'BATTERED and BLAMED'

- A report on wife assault from the perspective of battered women

Women's Research Centre

and

Vancouver Transition House

November 1980

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'Battered and Blamed' - A report on wife assault from the perspective of battered women

by Vancouver Transition House and the Women's Research Centre

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Introduction

I.A. Research Rationale:

This research project was developed jointly by workers at the Vancouver Transition House and the Women's Research Centre. Each organization had worked for several years on the issue of wife battering and the need for services for battered women. Although the issue of family violence was receiving more attention in symposia and conferences and in the media than it had when we began our work, serious problems remained.

First, public consciousness of family violence and governmental and agency responses to the issue tend to construct the problem as one of a number of personal crisis situations requiring individual counselling; or focus on the impact on children, while ignoring the impact of wife battering on women. The result is a lack of official recognition and support for services for battered women. Transition Houses are widely acknowledged to be the only viable alternative for many battered women.* However, funding of houses across Canada is unpredictable and always scarce. Most houses operate at 100% capacity and, because of lack of available space, are forced to turn women away. Vancouver Transition House and the Women's Research Centre recognized the need to develop ways of finding the necessary data to support a mandate for the establishment of more Transition Houses and other essential services for battered women.

Secondly, women's groups and others who want to start Transition Houses and similar services required information about the concept and structure - physically, financially and philosophically - of such an organization. We saw an opportunity to provide other groups with useful information by documenting how Vancouver Transition House operates. At the same time, the research process would enable this particular House to assess its own functioning and consider any changes that may be necessary.

Finally, it had become evident to both groups that the kind of research on wife battering being done by researchers in professional agencies and academic institutions was not satisfactory. It tends to focus on the incidence or origins of wife battering or on psychological approaches to the problem. Existing research fails to look at the problem situationally - that is, in context, as it actually occurs. In addition, it does not direct itself to the role and responsibilities of the agencies and institutions that deal with wife battering. Furthermore, the most serious gap in existing research is the absence of empirical studies, based on battered women's actual experience. Transition House staff have information and expertise regarding the situation of battered women (and their children), both in their marriages and in the transition phase, that is not available elsewhere. Therefore, Vancouver Transition House and the Women's Research Centre undertook this research project in an attempt to document women's situations, needs and concerns - to move beyond the theoretical discussions of "why" wife battering occurs to a more practical discussion of how it occurs and is perpetuated. By making available research that is done by and with women who are actually in or have access to the situation, it is possible to define more clearly the problems and the needs and to propose solutions.

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* See Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle, MacLeod, 1980, pages 48-52, for a review of the development and problems of Transition Houses.

I.B. Purpose of the Research Project:

This project was designed to provide information, based on battered women's experience, about the problem of wife battering and the function of Transition House. This information is intended for the use of women's groups and other organizations who are in a position to support or initiate services for battered women and/or to work for changes that are necessary in legislation, policies, and programs.

I.C. Research Description:

I.C.1. Methodology[*]:

The approach used in this research was based on the anthropological method of participant observation. This approach starts from the assumption that in order to understand what is happening in a society or in a situation, one needs to participate in it. The aim is to present for others' understanding the situations one has seen, heard or acted in.

Interviews with Transition House residents were conducted by Transition House workers and formed the basis for this report. The interviews were small scale and intensive and concentrated on the women's experiences - their descriptions, in their own words, of what their lives were like; how the violent situations had occured; what they did or tried to do to change their situations; the community resources they approached and what happened; how they came to Transition House; and their thoughts about Transition House as well as their future and their children. Women's descriptions of their lives provide a basis for understanding how wife battering occurs.

Interviews with Transition House staff were conducted by Women's Research Centre workers. These interviews concentrated on documenting the House workers' knowledge of wife battering and their experiences in working with battered women; a description of their work and the daily operation of Transition House; the availability and usefulness of community resources; and their suggestions for improving services for battered women.

In addition, a research file sheet was administered by Transition House workers to each resident during the research period to collect basic demographic information on whom Transition House served as well as the problems battered women faced and the resources they used.

Confidentiality was ensured by coding all interviews and file sheets.

While a study of this design, being an exploratory rather than statistical study, cannot and does not claim statistical generalisability, it does represent the accounts of Transition House residents and workers and provides the basis for a clearer understanding of wife battering.

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[*] For the instruments that were used for data collection, including interview guides and research file sheet, see Appendix I .

I.C.2. Research Process and Time Frame:

(a) March to May 1979: The concept and design of the research project were developed in meetings of Research Centre and Transition House staff. It was agreed that the research would be a joint process.

The basis for the research would be the accounts of battered women themselves, as documented in their interviews with Transition House staff. These interviews would be entirely voluntary. They would be informal and open-ended and as much as possible a part of the ordinary and ongoing relationship staff have with the residents. It was hoped that the interviews could be helpful in assisting residents to examine and assess their own situations in a constructive and supportive relationship.

Research File Sheets would be used to collect basic demographic and descriptive information as well as statistics. We agreed that the collection of this information must not interfere with the interaction between the staff and the residents. Therefore, it would be done in part during each resident's initial (or intake) interview and in part during the resident's stay as she became better known to the staff. All statistical information was decided upon with direct application in mind - each question was assessed to ensure it was necessary and useful, rather than simply "interesting."

Interviews with Transition House workers were accepted as the best means of documenting their knowledge, work, and the operation of the House. The interview process had the advantage of being less time-consuming for staff and likely to elicit information about their work that they may take for granted as a common feature of their daily routine.

(b) June 1979: Interview Guides for staff and resident interviews and the Research File Sheets were reviewed and accepted. A "research committee" of Transition House and Research Centre workers was established to co-ordinate the project by means of monthly meetings to review progress. Data collection began.

(c) June 1979 to February 1980 - Research File Sheets:

A total of 148* women came to Transition House during the research period and a Research File Sheet was administered to each (including one resident who chose not to answer several of the File Sheet questions). Four women stayed at the House twice during the research period; however, the information for both stays was recorded on one File Sheet.

As the File Sheet information was collected, it was placed on large charts and tallied. The research committee reviewed the charts regularly to locate any gaps in the data and to examine trends or themes which should be explored further. This process resulted in three revisions of the Research File Sheet.

The most significant revision was to add a section for "Direct Statements." We recognized that we needed to provide a place where the women could describe in their own words their history of violence in their own or their husbands' families; ways in which they were isolated by their husbands; any forced sexual activity; and their descriptions of what constituted psychological abuse. (One hundred and four of the Research File Sheets included the "Direct Statements" section.)

Other changes made in the File Sheets were under the headings of "Medical Treatment" (specifying hospital, family doctor or self treatment rather than "Have you ever been to the hospital for treatment?"); and the inclusion of "age of woman"; and of dates in relation to the use of resources or programs. (Fifty Research File Sheets with these revisions were used.)

(d) July 1979 to February 1980 - Resident Interviews:

A total of 21 residents were interviewed by Transition House workers. Prior to interviewing, workers participated in an interview skills workshop conducted by Research Centre staff. Workers selected residents for interviews at random on the basis of the residents willingness to be interviewed. Interviews were recorded in the first-person - that is, in the residents' own words. The average length of interview was one and a half hours. Seven women were interviewed after they had left Transition House; all the others were interviewed during their stay.

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*Nine of the 148 residents had not come to Transition House from a marital relationship. The information provided by these women is included in this report only where it is appropriate.

(e) July 1979 to April 1980 - Staff Interviews:

Fifteen Transition House staff were interviewed by Research Centre workers. Three of these House workers were interviewed immediately after they had resigned from staff. Since each had worked at the House for more than a year, we believed it was important to include their perspectives. The three workers who replaced them were interviewed only after they had been on staff for several months and were familiar with the operation of the House. Staff interviews were also recorded in the first person and lasted one and a half hours, on average.

(f) July 1980 to November 1980 - Analysis of Data and Process of Report Writing:

Based on the research committee's ongoing analysis of data, Research Centre workers prepared several outlines of the final report. Each outline was reviewed by the research committee and revised according to changes in perspectives as the process of analysing the data progressed. In addition, two Transition House workers undertook a review of Canadian research and resources related to the problem of wife-battering. (See Bibliography for a list of references used in this report). However, as noted above, the basis for the research report was the accounts provided by battered women themselves. Therefore, the outlines and the process of writing the report concentrated on the residents' interviews and generally followed the progression of questions and responses outlined in the Interview Guide (See Appendix I for Resident Interview Guide).

The report, completed by Women's Research Centre workers in November 1980, was reviewed by Transition House staff, including the members of the research committee, prior to publication.

II. A Guide to the Research Report

The report has three major components.

First, we set the context for wife battering by presenting six case histories. These case histories are the complete interviews of six battered women, as they were recorded by Transition House workers. They are the accounts women gave of their experiences and routines as they described living them. The cases are not intended to be typical or representative. However, they do provide a picture of wife assault as it exists for these women; they do demonstrate the variety of patterns in battered women's situations; and they are a background or context for the quotations that are used throughout the rest of the report.

The second major section of the report is a description of wife assault in all its aspects: physical, psychological and sexual - from the perspective of battered women themselves. This description serves to clarify what wife assault actually is. In addition, we provide a picture of who battered women are based on the population for this research; and we present information on their backgrounds. Specifically, we report their comments on their family history, expectations of marriage and what their marriages were like generally.

The third element of the report is an analysis of ways of dealing with the consequences of wife battering. This chapter reports what women themselves do to change their situations and assesses the responses of the medical and helping professions, the police and the legal system. The chapter concludes with a description and an assessment of Transition House as a response to battered women.

Throughout the report, direct quotations, from the interviews with 21 Transition House residents, are used wherever they are representative or otherwise significant. Every effort has been made to preserve the sense of their comments. However, to ensure confidentiality, identifying details (such as location, ethnic background, et cetera) have been altered slightly or omitted. All women are described as they presented themselves to the researchers. Therefore, Indian women and immigrant women have not been distinguished from other women, unless they spoke to a situation or a problem as a separate issue.

The terms "wife battering" and "wife assault," and occasionally "wife abuse," are used interchangeably. Terms such as "domestic dispute" or "family violence" are not used in reference to women's situations because they tend to obscure the recipients of the violence. In addition, the terms "wives" and "husbands" are used to refer to women and the men with whom they are involved in marital or spousal relationships including common-law relationships.

Finally, conclusions and recommendations, are presented in Chapter VII as a reflection of the accounts, concerns, and needs of the Transition House residents and workers who participated in this research project.

III. Setting the Context of Wife-Assault: Six Case Histories

The aim in presenting these case histories is to reveal the context of violence against women. This entails the sequence of events, the time periods operative, and the relationships involved, as well as providing an account in day-to-day terms of the living experience of the women. In addition these case histories show the range of women who suffer abuse in terms of background, status, education, and ethnic affiliation. It is important to stress that these case histories are not presented as being representative or typical of any or all of the situations described. But because they are more detailed, they provide a context for the quotations used elsewhere. They are included in this form because they aid in demonstrating the variety of patterns involved. They are also an account of the experience of the women themselves, as they present it, as they describe living it. The discussion which follows focusses on some of the recurrent patterns in the case histories.

First we must clarify the basis on which these six case histories were selected. The following criteria were utilized: variation in the economic situation of the women (i.e. economically dependent [1,3,4,6][1] or independent [2,5]); the degree of detail in the interview; variation in status as it emerges from the discussion of family background; the presence or absence of drinking as an element in the past or present [3,5,6]; and the educational and occupational levels involved. Since the aim is, as far as possible, to highlight the variation in the situations of the women who suffer abuse, as well as to reveal their similarities, great care has been taken to present a range of circumstances. Features of the situation which were not taken into account as a basis for selection were the types or occasions of assault, ethnicity, children (or their ages), age of the woman, length of the marriage or relationship, and whether or not the woman returned home. The themes which emerge from this set of case histories do so against a background of varied circumstances and situations. To reiterate, the aim here is to present the case histories as documents of the context of abuse for different women, their life experience and routines.

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[1] The numbers following examples in this discussion refer to the case histories.

In presenting these case histories what we want to show is the essential "ordinariness" of the lives of the women and men involved, regardless of social position. Clearly, no woman is excluded from the possibility of being the recipient of abuse by virtue of her competence or status, or that of her husband. There is considerable range and variation in situations that produce the same response: physical and/or psychological abuse. The people involved come from a variety of backgrounds, stable and unstable, all social classes, from situations that incorporated violence in the parental home and from those that did not. The pattern here is by no means one that necessarily links violence in the past to violence in the present. Alcohol is often but not always involved. The women who suffer abuse are educated and uneducated, economically independent and dependent. They may have been married for many years during which beatings were sporadic, or such acts against them may be recent. There may be a long slow build-up of tension and frustration or a short bitter struggle ending in the same expression - violence against the women. Beatings or violence or abuse of some kind may start on the first night of marriage, or emerge after years of settled, even routinised, conflict. These are some of the types of variation.

In looking at these case histories from the vantage point of an overview, what we see are the day-to-day crises: the build-up of jealousies, of arguments, of financial problems, of outside or general pressure or strain - until the man can no longer cope. It is important to be aware that the limits of his ability to cope may initially be low. There seems to be a tolerance, if not an acceptance, of men as "bad-tempered" or given to outbursts of temper at best, which is perceived as being legitimate.

While it would be inappropriate to generalise too far on the basis of such selected case histories/examples, we can begin here to isolate at least some of the recurrent themes, discussed at greater length in Chapter IV.

Recurrent Themes:

Problems around money and its control emerge very clearly from the case histories. The husbands want to supervise the family and household but frequently do not have the resources or competence to do so; that is, they are often unemployed, or not earning enough to adequately support their families. Or, they may feel they haven't achieved sufficiently and choose financial instability. What is in question here, at least as it emerges in the perceptions of the women associated with them, is their social competence. For a man to fail to adequately support family and household, for whatever reason, personal,economic, or social, is a serious failing in the eyes of our society. It erodes the fabric of the unit and the relationship. Where women manage on their own, their management and service to their husbands is called into question. Ability to earn money, to cook, to care for the children, all become ingredients of a continuing critique which builds up into a situation in which "the woman can do nothing right." [3,4,6] Reciprocally, he too may be able to do nothing right, but the assignment of authority is such that he has control of the situation [1,2,3,6] - a point which will be elaborated below. Here we want to note that this pattern of social responsibility sets the framework for psychological abuse, which may, but need not always, develop into physical abuse. Accompanied by drinking [3,5,6], which is both a chronic expense and socially disruptive, this can lead to loss of control, the end result of which is violence. We note drinking here not as a cause but often rather as an excuse for the behaviour. Women report that their husbands do not remember beating them while they were drunk, or note that men are gentle and considerate except when they are drunk. Reported in this way, drinking operates as "the giving of permission" for violent behaviour. Sudden eruptions of violence of this kind are not the only ones documented. There are situations in which the violence is systematic and continuous, both physical and verbal, and which is neither explained nor excused. We discuss this below in relation to the issue of authority and control.

In connection with the women's past or background, it is worth noting the presence of violence, specific or generalised. It does occur in some of these cases [1,4], but violence in the present is not necessarily preceeded by violence in the past [2,3,5,6]. In terms of background or past, another feature is worth noting. It is one which is not often stressed but which here does recur: namely, women's expectations when they marry. If their parents' relationship was seen as "good" or simply adequate, then the expectation is that their own marriages will follow the same pattern. Positive models, in other words, are derived from their background. If their parents' marriage, or the family background, was seen as problematic, then frequently the hope is still that their own marriage/relationship will turn out better. It is worth stressing here that, in either case, this does not work out in practice.

Explanations for the discontinuity between expectation and reality are necessarily complex. What emerges from these cases is that women's expectations are principally to marry, or find an equivalent relationship with a man. Given that, they then hope for a reasonable, considerate, financially responsible husband for themselves, and father for their children. They hope, or aim, to preserve their freedom or independence inside marriage, and to find companionship as equals. If we compare these expectations and hopes with the reality these women now face, a number of patterns or themes emerge. First, in some cases the men do indeed begin as reasonable, considerate, financially responsible partners. Why they change is a question to which we will turn later. Second, the expectation or determination to maintain freedom/independence within the marriage poses problems and strains [1,3,5]. Again, this theme will be pursued shortly. Third, pregnancy and the arrival of children places additional stress on both partners. The husband's jealousy [4,5,6] is the theme which frequently characterises these situations. Again, this will form part of the discussion below.

In discussing these patterns/themes from the case histories, we will look last at why men change, although as a crucial question, we posed it first. To begin, it is important to look at the changes that marriage (entering a relationship) bring about for women and men, and at some of the more generalised expectations of both partners. When women want to preserve their freedom/independence in marriage they are often challenging a basic presumption, whether they are aware of it or not: men have the social right, within marriage, to make the rules. Time and time again, this is reflected in the patterns of problems that recur: for example, he doesn't like her to have friends of her own [3,6], and/or to go out on her own and he may forbid her to do both or either. He may make it difficult or impossible for her to maintain old contacts. He goes out on his own regularly and excludes her from participation in his social world and activities, despite her requests and protests. He demands service, the food he likes, prepared properly, by his definition, a clean orderly house, and quiet children [3,4,6]. Again, the situation, whether service is adequate or inadequate, is defined by him [1,2,3,6]. When his views encounter resistance, the end result here is consistently abuse of the woman, his wife, who does not, and often indeed cannot, meet his arbitrary standards. Abuse here may be a constant critique of her competence, appearance, a general undermining of her social ability, and/or physical abuse. It can be precipitated either by her protest or resistance, i.e. "nagging", or by her failing to meet impossible standards. In either case, what is notably absent is any ability to work out a basis for negotiation. This may be a consistent problem or it may be more conspicuous here because what we see is the culmination of often years of frustration or hostility. What is apparent here is women's social dependency. Regardless of their economic situation, the status of women in marriage is of a dependent, and this often does not fit with the women's other expressed expectations and needs.

In relation to the management of the household and the care of the children, the issues become even more contentious. Often the man does not earn money, or not enough money, but nonetheless expects his household to be managed carefully and well. He may go so far as to expect his wife to deal with all aspects of day to day management of household and family affairs, including dealing with his creditors. Failure to comply, protests, resistance, meet abuse, either psychological or physical or both. With regard to the children, the expectation is that she will look after them exclusively and "properly", by his definition, rather than according to shared or agreed-on rules. Failure to comply leads to abuse of the woman and sometimes of the children as well. Here it is important to stress that women's social dependency is manifested by the systematic denial of her right to define the rules of household management by herself for herself. The definition of a properly run household is derived from rules made by men. External factors, especially media advertising, reinforce his assumptions regarding his position and rights.

In looking at this pattern of ascribed authority, its source, and its requirement for masculine competence, we can perhaps begin to see or suggest why men change. We do not have their account of their problems or feelings, only their reflection from their wives. However, this does suggest some avenues which should be followed. Social and economic authority in the marriage are allocated to the husband. His authority is derived in part from his ability and success at being the support of his family/household in the eyes of society. Many of the men in these cases are not successful, in these terms, in the public world and this has repercussions in their private worlds. The pressure to take responsibility for the family is a heavy one and failure to meet it creates both social and personal problems. These are further exacerbated in times of economic hardship, high unemployment and so on. But the men needn't be actual failures in these terms; it appears that simply their sense that they are can bring about the same responses. In looking at situations which produce abuse, we need to be aware of these pressures. It is important to stress that this provides a basis for an explanation; it is not an excuse for the behaviour.

Further, from these case histories and from some of the studies now available, it is becoming apparent that often men are being socialized to control, but they are not adequately prepared for the concomitant responsibility. After continuous frustrations and pressures in a situation they have difficulty changing and yet which they define as being within their control, abuse or violence then,rather than negotiation, is the outcome. It is important again to be aware of the social consequences for men of domestic authority, handled well or badly; of course, this does not make violence towards women excusable.

One final point to note here is the question that is often raised: why do women return, once, if not repeatedly, to situations which seem to be intolerable to an outsider? Again, this is a complex question which six case histories alone cannot answer. However, they do suggest some directions which need to be explored to begin to answer this question. First, in many cases there is genuine caring and commitment involved, which opens the possibility or hope of change; second, continued emphasis on the woman's fault and incompetence can result in her believing that if she tries one more time to change, then her situation too will change; third, women fear loneliness and isolation which they assume will be the consequences of living alone, and also the criticism they feel they will incur if they do so; fourth, some women see the relationship between father and child as being essential and their duty or responsibility to maintain; finally, social and economic dependence, coupled with these features, are powerful incentives for staying or returning. In addition, women are often sent back, directly or indirectly, by the agencies they contact. To stay or leave is not simply a matter of their own free choice between equally weighted options.

In conclusion, a final point to stress from these case histories is the role and importance of Transition House and its staff. In most cases the women comment repeatedly on their need for support, for a place to go that is different from home, that will provide unqualified support initially, and help and advice in addition. They note the importance of sympathy, of learning to understand their situations better, and many stress that it helps them to know they are not alone in the problems they face. The house and its staff perform a much needed service, and perform it well in the eyes of the recipients. There were few complaints, and frequently there were favorable comparisons between Transition House and more standard services, which tend to be less sympathetic towards women. Although some individual social workers do offer understanding and support, others are severely critical of the women, and insensitive to their immediate circumstances and needs. Whether the women return to their situations or leave them, Transition House offers an essential service, and a much needed, and indeed appreciated refuge.

Finally, it is important to stress that whatever the causes of wife battering, the consequences have to be dealt with. Our task here has been to provide a picture of the situation as it exists for women. Given this picture, it is urgent that appropriate aid be given to women.

CASE HISTORY #1

My husband and I are both German, but we met in Vancouver. I met his parents one time when we went back for a visit - they were O.K. They were pretty middle class people. They were quite ordinary people; there was nothing violent.

My parents live in Vancouver now. When I was a child I used to get punished a lot. If I did something wrong, or got bad grades or something, I would be made to kneel on my knees in the corner for a couple of hours. I also got slapped and hit a lot by both my mother and father. I'm just starting to remember all of that just now. I guess I deserved it.

I met my husband at a New Year's Eve party. I was 17. We went together on and off for two years. He was quite a kind of a playboy. I lived with my parents up until I got married to him.

I was 19 years old and three months pregnant when we got married. He said he loved me, but I think he married me because I was pregnant. That's what he would tell me when he was mad anyway.

I expected togetherness from marriage. I expected that we would go places together, I would have more freedom, I could go anyplace with him, I could stay up all night if I wanted to.

The abuse began when I was seven months pregnant. He was going out all the time and I objected. I wanted to go too. When I complained, he hit me. Because I tried to argue with him he just hit me more. He says that he just got mad. If I would have shut up he would have stopped hitting me. He was always right, and I was always wrong.

When I see him now and ask him why he hit me, he says it was because he had problems at work and worried if we would have enough money. He says he just wanted to go out with the guys and have a few drinks and also he knew that if he stayed home he would just end up hitting me; although he drinks very little and if he does he gets sick.

He never wanted to take me out with his crowd. If he did, he would leave me by myself the whole evening. He didn't ever mind me having my own friends though.

We had some problems over handling (child), I never liked him to hit the child, only I could do that. Once I told (child) to kneel in the corner because he had done something wrong. He was only there ten minutes when my husband told him to go to his room. I said no. (Child) kept looking at me and didn't know what to do, but he obeyed me and stayed in the corner. My husband was really angry and I really got beaten for that. I got badly beaten then.

My husband was close to (child) until he was about one year old. At that time my child started visiting frequently with my parents and my husband said they were turning him against his father. I think that was in his mind, although my parents started hating him when they found out he was beating me.

I meant everything to be different than it is. I wanted to teach my child things, to make him happy. But I hit him a lot. Sometimes I would hit him for no reason; he would ask me something and I would just tell him to shut up, and hit him. I dream of hitting him. Sometimes I go to work crying over what I have done. Because of this he is very fast tempered. My husband used to beat me in the face, and if I covered my face I would get it everywhere else. My child told me once, "Daddy beats you and you beat me." I remember a few times I really lost control and grabbed (child) by the neck. I was really frightened by that. I went to the doctor and he gave me valium. I hope (child) can forget all of that. But even now if I move fast he goes white, and I have to tell him, "Look, I am not going to hit you." I won't hit him anymore. I hope he can forget.

As far as money went, my husband was perfect. He even tried to push me to buy clothes for myself, and I could have anything I wanted if there was money for that. Mostly I wanted to buy clothes and things for (child) and for him.

He wanted to be head of the house and I didn't object. I sometimes thought everything should be 50-50, but I was happy with the way things were that way.

I never tried to get help from anyone outside. What I did was one month I would try one thing - one month another. I tried to change myself. One month I would tell him everything and when that didn't work, the next month I would tell him nothing. It's just that he likes to go out by himself. I was jealous and I didn't trust him. People, friends, used to say to me, "How can you stand it?" It bothered me a lot. I am Roman Catholic and the Priest came the other night to bless the apartment. He is really pressuring me to work things out; to talk things over and work things out. He says, "I know you really love each other and you are tearing each other apart." He said we belong together, and he offered for us to get together with him and he would help us to work out our problems. But we used to go to mass and this has been going on for five years.

I feel badly, but I got used to living on my own now. I want to stay on my own with my son. I feel I was burned badly and I don't want to try again. My husband wants to get back together but I don't. He comes by and he is friendly but I think I have made up my mind. If you don't trust someone it's no good. I'm going to stay on my own.

Mostly my fears are regarding my son. What if he asks why he doesn't have a father or brothers and sisters? Will I have everything for him that he needs: money for schooling, all that stuff? Also, I hope that he will be some special guy that can understand things - that will never hit his wife.

Right now I feel O.K. about myself and my life. I don't know; if I didn't work shifts it would probably be easier. But I am just living day to day. I get upset and angry over bills but I am just living day to day.

The Transition House workers were all great. I was there once before and they took me back again. They helped me when I needed it.

A worker from the House called me to invite me to a party; now you have come to interview me. I had mostly forgotten about the beatings but now I remember all over again and I feel depressed. I think when I finally feel O.K. about all of that I might want some contact, but now it's too new.

CASE HISTORY #2

My husband and I are from Fiji. Both our families are quite well off financially. He said his mother used to beat him as a child, but I never saw any of that. I saw that he had loving parents. I was the eldest of five children. I came from a very good family. My parents were both professional people. They put all five of us through university. There was never any sort of violence at all and my dad never hit or hurt my mom or the children. My parents were Roman Catholic; they believed in the principles of Christianity, but they were not fanatically religious.

I met my husband at university; we were students together. I'd had another boyfriend, but he left for the United Kingdom. After he left I got involved with my husband. Perhaps it was sort of on the rebound. We dated for six months and were married. We were married for 16 years.

I expected a good marriage like my parents had. They were married for 30 years, all their lives. I looked for a solid, stable and secure marriage. I expected to stay in love for a long time, to be together, to educate the children. I looked to my parents example.

In 1977 my husband punched me in the face. I was standing up for my right not to have to deal with his creditors. There were other minor incidents, but this is the major one that I remember; it was bad. His abuse was mainly of the children physically and me psychologically.

I have two girls ages 14 and 15. They are both in high school. And these two girls are really frightened of him. When they are around him they are so self-conscious about their actions because they are punished for every little mistake, and they are punished severely. Generally both girls would be punished together. It might be for having their nails too long, or wearing make-up or not answering the phone according to the way they have been taught, which is designed to protect my husband from creditors. If he lost a tennis tournament - he plays tennis and takes it seriously - if he lost, the girls could expect to be beaten. If he lost, the girls got scared. Here is an example. This is the example that led to the end. One girl came home about 6:00. She was late for dinner and didn't come straight home from school. She had actually been playing monopoly with a friend, but she was scared and lied to her father and said she had volleyball practice. He accused her of lying and slapped her face wildly over and over. Then he beat her with a belt, then he took her in the bedroom and beat her some more. Then he dragged her outside still beating her with the belt. One of the neighbours called 'help line'. This was the first time this came to the attention of others.

It was about 8:00 the night of the beating I described. He had calmed down and was lecturing to the girls when two social workers from the Ministry of Human Resources arrived. We were very surprised. We didn't expect that someone would report this. When I picked up that apartment intercom, and they said who they were, I just felt so good. I felt at last it has come to light. He told the social workers that he was a strict disciplinarian because he wanted the girls to grow up to be good girls. That's how he justifies his way. The social workers left an M.H.R. card with each girl, so they could phone if they needed to. In the morning my husband took them and tore them up.

Three days later a social worker came to check up on how things were going. He was friendly and accommodating, the perfect father, the ideal husband. He really tried to impress her. But the social worker was too smart. She noticed how the girls were so tense and scared, and that he was doing a big drama. A week later she called me at work, and she went to see the girls alone that afternoon. The girls told her absolutely everything. She arranged to come back that night and I didn't tell my husband. When she showed up he was furious. They argued and he threw her out. He was really nervous. Emergency Services checked with us that night a few hours later. My husband had gone out and we were all right.

The girls told me that they were feeling really good that the social workers cared; they felt safer, and they were glad it was out in the open. They have always asked me that we leave him, but I always wanted to try to straighten things out. I wanted my marriage and my family to work. For years this had been happening, but I wanted to avoid a scandal, and I thought I could make it work. Can you imagine hearing your kids screaming and you feel you can't do anything? There were times when I wanted to kill him. I thought if he was just out of the way we would be happy. The marriage was awful.

Several weeks later we were all sitting in the car. My husband was angry. He told us all to get out of the car or we would all get hurt. He reached over and pushed me out. As we were walking back to the apartment, I began to realize all that he had been doing. All that he had done to us. I made the decision that I couldn't take anymore. I told the girls when we got to the apartment to dress warmly because I didn't know where we would go or what would happen or where we would spend the night. As we were dressing he came to the apartment. I locked him out and he went to the balcony window and kicked in the sliding glass door. We ran down the street to a friend's place. That night the social worker from the Ministry of Human Resources got us into Transition House.

I was the major wage earner. We used to make about the same amount of money but he squandered his money. I paid for the rent and food and everything. He always spent more than he made. He wanted to impress people that he had a lot of money so he lived high. He never took any responsibility for supporting the family. He never gave me any money, but I wasn't too affected by that because I had my own income. If I was a woman who had to depend on a husband's support I would have been sick mentally and physically a long time ago. His creditors were always hounding us. It was constant. He always depended on me to deal with these creditors - I was a "fixer" - I could "fix" anything, and often I did.

Nothing would really have helped I don't think. There are clinics for people who abuse their children. But the background for him was really guilt over his financial irresponsibility which I think he took out on the children. Also it wasn't just one thing. It was many things added together.

I feel I am a strong and independent woman. I have lots of confidence and I feel very good about myself. At first when the marriage broke up I worried that people who knew me socially and at work wouldn't respect me anymore; that this would ruin my image. I have discovered that these people like me for me, and it feels very good.

I feel very happy and fortunate to have found this place (Transition House). The workers are generally very nice and helpful and very accommodating. Staying here has made me feel safe and comfortable and just great. Even with the restraining order I wouldn't have felt safe in my apartment.

My stay here gives me time to think about the future and at the same time to reflect on the past. Transition House lives up to its purpose; it really is a transition house. Some people, as soon as they leave, will want to forget about the house, but I feel different. I want to keep in contact with the workers and the people whom I have met and liked.

CASE HISTORY #3

My common-law husband has a temper. His father was fairly strict from what I've heard; he was certainly the head of the house. There were seven kids in the family. One time I heard that his parents split up and his older sister looked after the kids. I think she dominated him. Maybe that's why he can't stand being dominated by women. He won't even have it equal, he has to be over, you know. His sister was really something. Once I visited them (her); she had ten kids. One of her kids did something wrong at the table and she slapped her and sent her flying back off her chair.

My background, there was no drinking or violence there whatsoever. All my friends were very surprised when my parents split up. I was about 16 when my mother left, and I stayed with my father. I used to see her occasionally but not very much. I had a mother that didn't really care. Maybe that's why my own daughter is so important to me.

I guess my common-law husband and I dated for about a year before we moved in together. That was 12 years ago. He had just gotten a divorce from a nine-year marriage. I was looking to live with someone rather than marry them because - dig this - I would be able to keep my freedom and wouldn't be dominated. I was 25 then and I felt I had my own life. It didn't quite work out that way, but that is mostly what I expected, to keep my freedom. And I guess basically I went with him for companionship. I was very lonely and maybe anyone would have done!

If I look back I could have spotted exactly what it would be like, but I overlooked it and thought, "Oh well, he has good qualities, maybe these others will go away." The others were his drinking, his gambling and his bad temper. I tried to ignore it all and figured it would go away.

He was always very uptight and I couldn't relax around him. His being uptight made me uptight. And he was always depressed and miserable. The only times I ever saw him smile was when he was drinking. I remember noticing that.

About two or three months after we started living together we started arguing. He left me and went back to a relative in Winnipeg. I knew then that things weren't right; this wasn't a good relationship.

He called me to come to Winnipeg and I went. When we were there we still argued, but somehow, we ended up on the train coming back to B.C. together. It was like we couldn't live together and we couldn't live apart I guess.

We were together a year when I got pregnant. A mutual friend told me that he was very angry about it. He had three kids from his marriage and didn't want any more.

When I got pregnant I had morning sickness. He used to try and aggravate me all the time. For instance he would wake up in the morning and shake the bed, not violently or anything, but just to make me sick and annoy me; and things like that. I finally had to leave and go stay with a girlfriend. When the morning sickness stopped I went back. I had to leave again because things were awful; he was miserable all the time and he'd come in drunk and wake me up. I got a job as a live-in babysitter for a couple of months. That didn't work out so I went back to him for a night. In the morning he told me either I stay with him permanently, or be out of the apartment by the time he got home from work. I had a social worker then, and he told me to go to a home for unwed mothers. I did and I stayed there until the baby was born.

After she was born I took a job as a sort of live-in babysitter/companion for about two months and then got a basement suite of my own. We started seeing each other again and moved back together when the baby was about six months old. We stayed together then for about two and a half years. I wasn't happy. He was drinking and gambling and going out all the time and leaving me alone with the baby. We argued and I was going to leave, but he left instead and went back to his relative's again. Three months later he came back to me. I felt so free when he had gone. When he returned I felt ambivalence. For the next five years we were together. At that point I was paying the rent, and I tried often to throw him out but he wouldn't go. We didn't get along, we argued all the time, he would come home drunk and we had arguments. He would never take me out, yet he went out every weekend with his friends.

He is also very into threatening my security. He often says, "If I feel like putting you out in the middle of the night, you go."

I've never had many friends, having a small child and everything, it's hard to meet people. But the few friends I had he never liked. He would always put them down, like "she's stupid," or "who would want to go to bed with her," that type of thing. I really just didn't invite people over because I knew he didn't like them.

Three years ago we had a bad scene and we hadn't been speaking for about a week. He had criticized my cooking so I refused to cook for him. Usually when he got ornery I would get upset and try to go on and worry about whether I was doing it right. This time I called his bluff. Anyway, after about a week he wanted to make up and I wouldn't have any of it. He backhanded me across the face and told me to get out right then. It was about midnight. He told me to get dressed and get out and that I couldn't take my child. I got dressed and left and called a girlfriend and we got the police and went back and got my daughter. My daughter and I went to Transition House for a couple of weeks. From there I got an apartment where we lived for a month. My husband found out our address from the Welfare and started coming over. I went back with him at the end of the month and that lasted for about two months. We argued again and my daughter and I went back to Transition House and this time we stayed a month. Then we went back together again and stayed together then until I came to Transition House again about 18 months later.

He has never forced me to have sex, like he has never raped me, but I often did it to keep the peace. Once or twice I said no, and came out to sleep of the couch, and he would come out and turn the radio up full and turn on all the lights and bang around. I'd just give in, because you can't win. Even though I really think I have the right not to if I don't want to.

I think he abuses my daughter psychologically. He's very quick tempered with her and often I think he is quite unfair. I can't stick up for her any more because I think it just makes things worse. He made a statement once that she would always be my daughter and not his. That has always stayed with me. I know he loves her very much, but she is closer to me, and sticks up for me, and I know he really resents that.

He makes all the decisions about his money and I make them about mine. Up until last year he never had much money anyway. Now though, I have no idea what he does with his money after the rent is paid. I know he is always broke. He plays the horses and gambles and he bets big. If he has money he can't not bet - horses, T.V. sports games, anything. Right now though, he owes his bookie and he can't bet until he pays up so he's not betting this month.

I'm very concerned about my daughter being in this environment, it's not a good one for her, but what else is there to do? It's a way to give her things in life - clothing, entertainment, some pleasures. I can also be home for her after school and during the summer holidays. It's a terrible thing being in this situation for that, but there is nowhere else to go.

I once suggested that we go get marriage counselling but he wouldn't, he said they were all a bunch of donkeys. I feel if we could communicate, share more things, have more in common, that would help.

I felt the workers at Transition House helped my morale quite a bit. I often got the feeling that they were too busy to talk with me, and that's usually because they were. I appreciated that the worker came to court with me, that was a help. As far as the house itself went, I didn't feel good about it. It was very unclean most of the time, but I don't know how you could remedy that. I've come back to the house a couple of times looking for moral support but the workers have been too busy then too. I find it helps to phone if I want someone to talk to.

I would like to join a support group but if I ever did and my husband found out about it, it would cause a lot of trouble.

CASE HISTORY #4

My mother was a vicious alcoholic, who physically and verbally beat my father. She left the home when I was 12; she left all nine of us alone. I was away at boarding school where I had spent almost ten years of my life. My father called me at school and asked me to come home and care for the rest of the family, as I was the oldest child. From then on, I ran the whole family. I was the family banker. My dad would come home from fishing and sign his cheque over to me and ask me for some fun money. Well, after I had bought new shoes for all those who needed them and jeans for all my sisters, there was usually only about five dollars left for him to play with. He would take it happily and go to the bar for the night. He would come home and make sure all the kids were in bed and go to bed himself. He was a nice, kind man. He only ever hit me once, for running my little sister's hand over with the sewing machine. I did it because I was trying to make flannelette diapers for the baby and she kept sticking her hand into the way. He was real mad at me for doing that to her and I felt guilty for years after.

My husband's family was extremely violent and alcoholic. My husband's father beat his mother constantly but, because they were both alcoholics, nobody paid much attention. His mom died of cirrhosis of the liver at age 45; I think she had to drink to survive the misery at home. He's still alive, hanging around bars all day. I guess he's a hopeless case now. You know, I always thought all of my husband's meanness came from the way his dad used to beat him and his brothers and sisters, so I always forgave him.

I guess I must have left him 20 times in the years we were together, but because my mom left us I always felt I had to come back. I didn't want my kids to grow up bad, and say that their mom left them on their own. One time I even stole a truck while he was at work one day. I was friends with all the little kids on the reserve and I just made a game with them of helping me move all my stuff out of the house. He didn't even have a chair to sit on when he came home from work that night.

We were married when I was 18. He came to the graduation dance at the boarding school - I don't know who the hell invited him. Anyhow, he just sort of latched onto me and wouldn't let go. He was terribly afraid of being alone. He started working with my dad on the boats and the next summer we got married. My dad wouldn't even come to the wedding - he said he saw right through him and knew he was no good.

Well, I figured out right away what he was like. On our wedding night he ripped my nightie right off. I had to hide in the bathroom all night because I was afraid. We were given a house on the reserve for a wedding present. It is a huge old house and I was so used to being cramped in two little rooms, all I could think of was filling it up with children. I had a baby at 19, one at 20, one at 21 and then another one at 24. In that gap between 21 and 24 I had three abortions because my husband was so jealous of the time I spent with the babies he didn't want me to have any more kids. I couldn't take the pill because of my cardiac trouble. I felt he was always rushing me, not thinking what it was like to plan things for four kids.

When I was pregnant he still would beat me. He broke my jaw when I was pregnant with our first baby. He begged and pleaded with me all the way to the hospital not to turn him in. I guess I should have done that then and I wouldn't be here now. With the next baby he blackened both my eyes. I really lost my identity. I came to know myself as "hey stupid" or "hey dummy." Even though I knew it wasn't true, I never said anything back to him because I was so afraid. He never hit the first baby because he knew I wouldn't stand for that. The second boy, the one that's named after him, he hits all the time. I'm afraid that he's going to end up just like his dad and that scares me. One time he cut off my daughter's hair with a butcher knife.

I remember one New Year's, I was a little tipsy and decided I wouldn't make the gravy. He threw me into the kitchen and put my arm on the hot stove. I had a bad burn.

You know, when he was sober he was a nice man, always busy around the house, a good handyman. He was always willing to share his stuff with the neighbours and they all thought he was wonderful. Funny though, he never bought me any personal gifts at Christmas or on my birthday. He would buy me things for the house - sheets, pots and pans and stuff like that. He was really stingy with the kids and I think that's why my one son took to stealing. He couldn't understand how come daddy could always have anything new that he wanted, like a new truck, a new gun, and stuff like that. One time he took all my son's money he had saved up to buy a motorcycle and spent it on booze. My son was real upset about that. I think that's when he started stealing.

The last year we were together he really started hurting me badly; if I didn't know how scared he was of being alone, I would think he was trying to kill me. The night I finally left, I had gone to a movie with a friend in town and got home late. He was drunk and started calling me a whore and a slut and hitting me. He finally beat me unconscious and left me there. He fell asleep and when I woke up he was out like a light. My little girl was screaming, "Mommy you're going to bleed to death." There was blood all over the house. I went to the hospital and when they asked what had happened I told them that my husband had beaten me. They said that I was probably drunk too and didn't plan to do anything about it. So I called a cab and went to another hospital where they called in the police and asked me if I wanted to go to Transition House. It was good being there. I felt just like I did when I was at boarding school - so much privacy and nobody rushing me. I never favoured any of the workers. They were all really good. I would like to be trained as a Transition House worker or a Native Court worker. I think I'd be good at that because you don't need two hands to do it [she is partially paralyzed].

I worry about the kids growing up and feeling like I deserted them. They don't really understand why I left because, you know, they were so used to that kind of fighting and meanness they didn't notice anything strange about seeing me get beat up.

I hope to god I don't ever end up in Transition House again, not because I don't like it there, but because I don't ever want to be in that situation again.

CASE HISTORY #5

My husband was the second of four kids from a lower middle class family. He didn't have a very happy life. He says there was no violence, but when he describes the fights his younger brother had with his mother, they were physical. His father liked to gamble and there was a lot of drinking. While they did have enough, they really just scraped by.

I was an only child of working middle class parents. They were very education oriented. While they exercised verbal control, I was only spanked twice - and I don't know who was more upset, me or them. There was never any drinking and no violence between them at all.

I lived on my own prior to my marriage. I went to university and travelled around Europe. I lived in Europe for a couple of years. When I came to Canada it was to live with an old boyfriend. We had both changed and it didn't work out.

I met my husband when I was 26. It was a whirl-wind romance and we married five months after we met. I had no expectations of the marriage. I had my own job and my own money and I was really looking for companionship.

There have been three incidents of physical abuse. The first occurred approximately a year ago after about two years of marriage. The second, a few months ago just prior to my coming to Transition House. The third happened about a month and a half ago, since I have returned to my husband from Transition House. I feel the only thing that sets these incidents up is his drinking. He never remembers hitting me when these scenes are over, and he offers no explanation. He is jealous of my old boyfriend and imagines I will go back to him; this upsets him. But I don't think this is a reason for his drinking. Besides, my old boyfriend is now married and expecting a baby and while I sometimes think I'd like to see him or talk to him, this is just a fantasy my husband has.

I was pregnant several years ago with my second pregnancy. I didn't want to be pregnant; I didn't feel it was the right time. I was very ill with the pregnancy and I knew something was wrong. The child was still-born. My husband had been looking forward to it and was very upset. He felt guilty and went into a suicidal-depression. His drinking became much more frequent and he was eventually hospitalized. It didn't help. We made the rounds of psychiatrists and psychologists but nothing worked.

I am pregnant now. A month ago I came home and he was lying down in a drunken stupor. I kicked him and he shook me and I ended up smashing a bottle over his back. He went and talked to someone from A.A., but he joins then he falls off the wagon, then he is embarrassed to go back so he doesn't go.

I now feel angry with him, as distinct from being frightened or shocked as I was in the past. I am willing to put up with a few lapses as long as he's willing to work on the problem of his drinking. However, if nothing is done I will have to seriously consider my situation. I am considering joining Alanon. He feels threatened by that; he says all those women do is sit around wearing too much make-up and smoke too much.

He doesn't really engage in violence outside the marriage. He is mainly self-destructive. I think he has a lot of unresolved anger. He will do things like punch the concrete; self-destructive things to hurt himself. He has kicked down the door a few times.

Thank god I'm economically independent! We have very different ideas about how to spend money. He likes to spend money and to open all sorts of charge accounts. I like to know where my money is and to plan its use. He doesn't take much responsibility. I just stopped taking on the utility bill to force him to take this responsibility on. His mother used to stand at the door with her hand out on pay day, waiting for his father's cheque. Perhaps this is why he gets so upset about money. Anyway, he has gold taste and a brass budget.

We, as I said, went to a couple of psychiatrists and a psychologist but nothing worked. My husband wouldn't open up with them, but I also don't think they were very skilled either. My husband would like me to function as his counsellor and I've told him that's impossible and he says he can't understand why. I would like us to get into a group together. I think this would help. Also, I feel he needs more outside contact; he relies on me to fulfill all his needs. He needs more outside contacts, social contacts.

Some days I feel the marriage is good, and some days I wonder. I think it could be a good marriage. We have similar goals - for example, wanting to provide a warm home and good education for the children, to have a nice place to live, to take holidays. Mainly, that our life not be a struggle like our parents'.

I intend to finish my degree; I'm working on that. If the marriage deteriorates and it interferes with that then I'll leave. I have told him, "I can't let myself fall apart just because you want to fall apart." I feel good about myself. I am tired and I need more time for myself. He wants more of my attention than I can give. For example, I can read if he is busy doing something else, but if he isn't then he wants my attention. One of my concerns is not having enough time for myself.

I feel I am a determined woman. I feel, though that I should make the decision about staying in the marriage or leaving, but I just can't because children are involved. My fear about the future is that things won't improve and will get worse, and I will have to make the decision to leave. I fear for the children. It is also very important to me that things have changed by the time our child is old enough to comprehend what is going on.

Right now I feel positive about the marriage. Things have been going well for the past couple of weeks, things are going along smoothly. We have been making plans, going out together. I sometimes think, "How long is it going to last?" When things like this have happened in the past your trust factor gets affected.

My overall impression of the Transition House workers was that they were very supportive. My husband wasn't impressed, and wouldn't agree. He said that the Transition House worker, when we were at family court, looked at him like he was a piece of dirt - like "Why would she go back with you?"

I'm interested in seeing the report because I am studying and working in the area of family violence, but not interested in keeping up contacts outside of just knowing what is going on there.

CASE HISTORY #6

My parents were terrific. I can never remember an argument. I have never seen my dad drunk or heard him argue. My father is Canadian of Norwegian background and my mother is also Canadian of Spanish background. I had a very happy childhood.

As for my husband's parents, from what I've seen they get along very well. His father has a bad stomach so he can't drink, but he was in the war and he drank before. I didn't ever ask them about their past. They have always been very good to me.

Don't laugh when I tell you that I met my husband in a tavern in Blaine. I can remember seeing him, as a child in town. I was 25 years old when I met him, he's younger than I am. I went out with him for about two years before I got married. It was a pretty good relationship. He was nice to me, he used to bring me flowers. I thought that he was what I wanted. He was very considerate, always helped me. He seemed to have the feeling of security that I wanted, the stability. I believe there should be absolute trust in a marriage, and I thought that we had it. I like to live with someone who feels secure, who is proud of their partner and sure of themself, and someone who is secure financially.

I expected my marriage to be like my mother and dad's with no fighting or disciplining. I never saw my dad push my mother around in any way.

Right back to day one, he liked drinking, and I did too. But when I was pregnant I couldn't drink. A few months after we were married, when I was pregnant, he started drinking by himself. It stuck in my mind when I saw him have a beer in the afternoon by himself - it bothered me. Then I found out that many thing were lies - the assumptions of financial stability and security. He told me the wedding rings were paid for, but in one month the bill came for them. He had said he had lots of money, but I found out that he actually was in debt. I had to bail him out. I was never in debt when I was single. I had credit cards; ours were taken away. I thought that I knew him, but he was a smooth talker. I felt like a mouse. He had no idea about money, its value, or how to handle it. This dimmed our relationship right away. We had to use my car on the honeymoon. I suspect his new flashy car had been repossessed.

I worked until I got pregnant. After (child) was born, the jealousy started - "Why can't you come to bed?!" As I look back, it's when I started spending time with the babies that the complaints started. I would say to him, "This was what you wanted - babies!" Gradually, he started to drink more. One time he threw a case of beer at me when I was teasing him; it really startled me.

Over the next four or five years things got worse. He accused me of being a log and an ice-cube. He was getting to be a nag about sex, and he was drinking alone. The tinkle of ice-cubes made me furious - to think that he drank alone. Just a few months before we moved I heard him talking to A.A. on the phone, but he never phoned them again. The night that we were moving he was very drunk. I was hurt and angry, we were stopped by the cops. The next morning my dad drove a pickup, my husband drove another pickup. One of the units got a flat tire and my dad had to change it because, even though it was morning and he was driving, my husband was already too drunk to do it. When we got there he passed out. How am I supposed to feel about a man like that? You're supposed to forgive and forget, but only so far. And, of course, if I said anything or I suggested anything, I was told that I didn't know anything. He was always the boss; and I would stew and stew over the debts.

The one incident that stands out most was about one and a half years ago, and I didn't want him to go out and drive. At least he was safe at home. He had just recovered from a serious accident about four months before. I was trying to stop him from going and he said, "Don't touch me!" and I did and pow!, right in the mouth. He cut my jaw and I had a fat and purple lip. (Child) saw all that which isn't very good for a six year old. (Child) asked me, "Why is your lip so purple?" and I said that I hit it on the cupboard.

I couldn't be bothered when he was drunk, but he nagged and nagged for sex.

He never held any job for over a year. I thought maybe if we moved to the Interior and got away from the pressures that things would be better, but it was then that the drinking got worse. He had his own business then, and he could drink when he liked. It was then that he started to call me useless, or tell me, "You can't handle yourself, so how can you handle the kids!," or "You know that I picked you up from the slums," or "Why don't you ever come and throw your arms around me and praise me?" For what? - for drinking? He also threw up my past to me.

He had a fight in a pub once over a pool game and he came home with his eye hanging out.

He was very unpredictable. I couldn't say yes to an invitation because I had to ask the King, and I couldn't go out because I couldn't trust him to look after the kids. I came home once at 10:30 and he was asleep and the kids were all running all over the house, the baby in a dirty diaper - I was fit to be tied. I said, "If I can't trust you from 8:30 to 10:30 to look after the kids, I won't go out any more." A friend of mine said, "I quit coming around because of your husband's behaviour and drinking. In fact, I am afraid of him." She stopped letting her little girl come and play with (child) for the same reason.

Kids are kids, and when they were fussy he'd say, "Feed them first so that I don't have to listen to their bullshit." He would spank her and put her to bed without dinner at one and a half. He took (child) into the bedroom with a stick and I had to go in there and stop him and (child) had bruises on his bum. (Child) was only five years old. If I tried to make (child) eat his supper, he would say, "He's my boy, don't you touch him or correct him." And the next day he would be making him eat his supper.

I worked in his shop most days of the week and he never worked in the house. After I quit working he felt that the house was my responsibility. I felt, why should I work in the shop, then the house, with the kids, and then back in the shop at night again without him pulling his weight in the house. I felt I was doing everything, and a garden too.

He used to bitch because I didn't get our boy to school on time.

I asked him what he wanted for dinner because so many times he said, "What's this slop?" and pushed it off the table.

Once I realized our boy was having trouble at school (once at school my husband went drunk to see the teacher - I had asked him to wait until he was sober). The teacher said she felt that our boy was immature. He would have cars in his desk and play with them at school, instead of working. He would say things to his grandmother, and then I realized that he was thinking about home at school. Sometimes he would be looking forward to doing something at home with his father, but when he came home his dad would be asleep.

I tried to help him, more than change the marriage. I phoned A.A. and his mother. I would try to stop nagging him. I would agree with him to stop a fight. I am sure now that if I stood up to him I would end up badly beaten like (child). If the only way to get along was, "You Holler I Jump," then I'd do it, but that wasn't good enough.

A close friend to talk to, to spill my feelings to, would have helped me to leave. But I never had anyone say, "Get out of it." It took me a whole year to leave, to make up my mind. I was afraid to leave because of the threats,"I'll blow you away if you leave." Maybe a friend who could nose around for me, because I was never able to do it, and find out information. (A), my friend,gave me a lot of support. I'll never forget her.

I think I tried my best in my marriage and did what was helpful. I did more than my share. I don't feel that I'm perfect either, I'm stubborn. I don't know my true faults because all of my husband's accusations are from an irrational mind. He would tell me all these things and I would think, do I or don't I?

I think Transition House is terrific. TERRIFIC!!!, in great big letters three inches high. Before you come here you think you are the only person in the rat trap - mouse trap is too small- but you realize you are just one in a whole houseful.

One little sugguestion I would make. On the second day a person is here, maybe one of the workers could take the person into the office and give them the guidelines to the doors they can open. Ask, say, "What do you want to do?....you could do this, or that." I didn't know what to do and I didn't ask how I could get it. You should ask a woman, "What are your plans?" Give a woman guidelines about what you can get. At first it's hard to ask because you have come out of an intimidating situation.

I would like to keep in contact because it's the loneliness that gets to you, although living with an alcoholic is lonely. I see that there are many people worse off than I. I'll feel quite lonely until the divorce is finalized. Then it's all gone, in the past. The one person a woman knows well is their husband so they will go back to him no matter what the consequences. I had been so lonely for the last two years. I am babysitting him. It's great to keep in contact. [With Transition House women]. (B) phoned me tonight and it's great.

IV. Wife Battering From the Perspective of Battered Women

IV.A. Introduction:

Dictionary definitions of assault state that it is "a violent physical or verbal attack; an unlawful attempt or threat to injure another physically; and rape."[1]

The descriptions of assault Transition House residents provided to our researchers reflect all the aspects of assault encompassed by this dictionary definition. From information on the research file sheets, 79 women indicated they had experienced both physical and psychological assaults; 18 women indicated physical battering only; 36 indicated only psychological abuse, including verbal attacks and threats, etc.[2] In, addition, 27 women who reported battering and psychological abuse said they had also endured forced sexual activity, including rape.

Researchers and experts from various disciplines have developed a wide variety of theories and analyses to account for wife battering. Briefly, these theories range from the sociobiological which posits that aggression and violence are innate in "modern man" because of the survival value this behaviour has had for his ancestors; to sociological theories which maintain that violence is condoned and thus perpetuated by the formal and informal rules of society. The most prevalent theory, however, focuses on psychological factors. These are individual or intrapsychic factors, rather than the social structure: for example, some women like to be beaten and invite it, or wife battering is a matter of "interaction gone wrong," with violence the result of poor communication or lack of sensitivity between husbands and wives.

Based on battered women's actual experience, as they documented it for our researchers, it is clear that the aforementioned theories are over-simplifications, flawed by the lack of empirical evidence to substantiate them. The accounts battered women themselves provided are complex, sometimes appearing even contradictory. Nevertheless,

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1. Sources: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language - see also, Random House Dictionary; Oxford Dictionary.

2. Fifteen women indicated they came to Transition House for housing only.

their description of their lives and the assaults they have sustained do provide rich data that can serve to clarify the issue. Description is the basis and aim of this report. As much as possible, women's accounts are provided in context.

First, we describe the population of this study, according to the demographic information 148 Transition House residents provided to our researchers. Without claiming that our specific study is representative of the population as a whole, this information does evoke a picture of who battered women are. Secondly, we provide a background: their own and their husband's family history in relation to assault, based on the women's accounts; women's expectations of marriage; and their comments on their marriages generally. Using this as a base, the circumstances and consequences of physical, psychological and sexual assaults are described.

IV.B. Description of Research Population:

IV.B.1. Who are Battered Women?:

The description of the population of this research is based on the information provided by the 148 residents of Transition House during the research period. It is not our intention to generalize about battered women from this information. In fact, the diversity of Transition House residents' situations suggest that there is no stereotyped portrait of the battered woman: wife battering can happen to any woman.

Vancouver's Transition House,unlike other houses in British Columbia, is a fully funded regular programme of the Ministry of Human Resources. As such all staff are regular, permanent employees of the Ministry. The House accommodates those women who have little or no access to money and cannot find safe shelter elsewhere in the community. Presumably women who have either financial resources or alternative accommodation (for example, with family or friends) would be less likely to rely on a government funded residence. However, it should not be assumed from this that all of the residents of Transition House were from lower-income homes. As Linda MacLeod points out in Wife Battering in Canda: The Vicious Circle, even if the family income is above average, many women do not have access to those financial resources:

> Women with money of their own can sometimes afford to go to a hotel, to hire a lawyer. The transition house is not their only option. It must not be assumed however that all middle and upper-class women or all working women regardless of their class have access to money. Frequently all family finances are controlled by the husband and at best the wife receives an allowance. (MacLeod, 1980, p.12)

Most of the women who stayed at Transition House during the research period indicated that they came for refuge from battering and psychological abuse. Assault or abuse (such as rape, sexual abuse, or fear of renewed violence) also characterized the circumstances of the 15 women (or 10%) who were at Transition House for the indicated reason of "housing" alone. Ninety-five (or 68%) of the 139* residents from a spousal relationship indicated battering as a reason for coming to Transition House - either as the sole reason or in combination with psychological abuse and/or housing.

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*Nine women who were not from spousal relationships included victims of rape and sexual abuse, women who had been forced out of their homes, abandoned, or threatened with violence,or feared that a crisis involving renewed violence was imminent - clearly problems that are not unconnected to the subject of this report.

However, the number of battered women turned out to be higher than the initial indications. Among women who did not immediately indicate battering, it was apparent, from information obtained elsewhere in the File Sheets, that at least 26 had been subjected to physical assault in their spousal relationships at one time or another. The occurrence of the assaults, in these cases, ranged from "once" - "occasionally" - "often" to "every weekend." Transition House workers say it is not uncommon for women not to reveal, at first, that they have been beaten. In some cases, women accept violence as a normal aspect of their relationships and, therefore, do not identify it as the specific reason for coming to Transition House. In other cases, it was the build-up of tensions, which women recognized as a precursor of assaults in the past, that prompted them to seek refuge.

One hundred and fifteen (or 83%) indicated psychological abuse, either alone or in combination with battering and/or housing needs, as the reason for coming to Transition House.

(a) Age:

Ages were recorded for 34 Transition House residents. The ages of these women ranged from 17 to 56 years, with the greater proportion in their 20's and 30's. Eighty-two per cent were under 40 years old.

(b) Marital Status:

More than twice as many of the women (97) were married as were living in common-law relationships (42).

(c) Length of Relationships:

The length of relationships ranged from a few months to 40 years. However, 67, or nearly half of the women, said they had been in their relationships for five years or less. Thirty-three women said six to ten years; and in 32 instances, the relationship was more than ten years in length. Eight of these relationships were of 25 or more years. (For seven women the length of relationship was not recorded.)

(d) Number and Ages of Children:

Eighty-nine (64%) of the women in a spousal relationship (either married or common-law) brought children with them to Transition House, as did some of the single parent women. In all, one hundred and sixty-three children, from six weeks to 16 years of age, came with their mothers to Transition House during the research period. Well over half (62%) of the children were five years old and under.

(e) Education:

The level of schooling was recorded for 128 of the 148 Transition House residents. Seventy-seven women (60%) had completed high school, including 13 (10%) who also had a university education. Thirty-two women (25%) had not completed high school; 15 (11%) attended grade school only; and four (3%) had had no formal education.

The information women provided on their work experience and skills shows that most of those who attended university took courses directed to such fields as teaching, social work, and nursing. Twenty-five per cent (16) of the women who completed high school, but did not go on to university, took some form of vocational training after graduation. Twenty-five per cent (8) of those who did not complete high school also took vocational training. No special training was reported by those who had attended grade school only or who had no formal schooling.

According to the Women and Poverty report these women are typical. The report points out that girls in our society tend to have lower career ambitions than boys. This is the case, in part, because they believe that their main role in life is to be a wife and mother and expect to stay home while their children grow up (Report by the National Council of Welfare, 1979, p.17). The report goes on to note that one of the most important factors in determining what jobs women will hold during most of their lives is their level of education:

> If a girl and her parents hold the view that a grade 9 or 10 education is enough to get married and raise babies, chances are she will spend most of her life waitressing, cleaning houses and offices or working in factories - in other words doing our society's most unpleasant and lowest paid jobs.

However, among women with a high school diploma or more, most of them hold "subordinate positions in offices, stores, hospitals, telephone companies and banks." (Ibid, p.23) Therefore, there is a tendency in our society to invest less in a girl's education because it brings a lower return in the labour force.

(f) Work Experience and Skills:

The leading categories of employment experience among Transition House residents were: waitress (25 women); clerical, typing, and general office work (17); sales (17); and nurse's aide (13). Many women had more than one type of work experience and skills. The following list records the type or field of work or skills, with the number of times each was mentioned in brackets. The list shows that, as is the case generally with women in our society, most Transition House residents' jobs are part of the lower-paid jobs, or "female ghetto," in the labour market:

Artist(1)
Accounting(1)
Agricultural nursery(1)
Baby-sitting(4)
Bakery(1)
Bank work(2)
Barmaid(2)
Bartending(3)
Beadwork(1)
Bookkeeping(5)
Cannery(4)
Caretaker(1)
Carrier service driver(1)
Cashier(7)
Catering(1)
Ceramics(1)
Chambermaid(4)
Childcare(2)
Cocktail waitress(3)
Commercial art(1)
Composer(1)
Cook(3)
Craftswoman(1)
Dancer(2)
Deckhand(1)
Dispatcher(1)
Domestic (2)
Driver(1)
Drug counselling - kids(2)
Factory(8)
Farm work(2)
Fashion design(2)
Foster-parenting(1)
Hairdressing(3)
Handicap worker(3)
Homemaker/Housekeeper(10)
Housing agency(1)
Hostessing(1)
Hotel management(1)
Hotel (unspecified)(2)
Interior design/decorating(2)
Janitorial(7)
Keypunch(3)
Kitchen aide/help(5)
Knitting(1)
Lab technician(2)
Legal secretary(1)
Militia recruiting(1)
Modelling(2)
Music teacher(1)
Nurse(4)
Nurse's aide(13)
Nursing home general(1)
Office/clerical/typing(17)
Personnel work(1)
Photo finishing(1)
Post office(2)
Quilting(1)
Receptionist(1)
Research(1)
Restaurant sub-management(4)
Sales(17) (one woman had a store)
Sewing/tailoring(5)
Secretarial(7)
Social work(3)
Sorting clothes(1)
Sufficient for self-reliance(1)
Supervisor aide(1)
Teacher(7)
Teacher/school aide(2)
Telephone soliciting(1)
Vocalist(1)
Waitress(25)
Window-dressing(1)
Writing(2)

....

Stated "none" - 4
No record - 24
Retired - 1

(g) Family Income:

Although most Transition House residents said they had worked at one time or another, only 19 of the 148 (14%) indicated that a job currently constituted their "financial resources." The largest group, 41 (30%), reported themselves as dependent on their husbands, and the second largest group, 37 (26%) listed their financial resources as Social Assistance. Ten women did not indicate their financial resources.

Sixteen women reported they were at least partially dependent on their husbands but noted as well, income from Social Assistance,part-time work, handicap pension, and unemployment insurance.

Four women listed unemployment insurance as their sole source of income.

Another group of 12 women listed such sole resources as pensions, savings, and family interdependence.

Nine women said they had no financial resources at all.

The Women and Poverty report shows that, for women generally, marriage has important consequences, economically speaking. It points out that husbands are responsible for ensuring that their wives are housed, fed, and clothed; however,

> Husbands are not obliged to give any cash to their wives, at all...The result is that marriage is not a relationship of economic equals. If a wife stays in the home and her husband has a paid job, she is completely dependent on him financially. If he is generous, all is well, but if he is stingy her life can be miserable. As well as husbands who refuse to provide adequately for their families, there are many more who cannot. (Report by the National Council of Welfare, 1979, p.18)

These economic facts have serious implications for all women. As we'll see later in this report, they also figure prominently in the circumstances and consequences of wife assault.

IV.B.2. Profile of the 21 Residents who were Interviewed:

As a group, the 21 women who were interviewed at length run a fairly close parallel to the larger population of this research.

Ages, where recorded, ranged from 21 to 44; more than twice as many (14) were married as were living in a common-law relationship (6); and the length of relationships ranged from nine months to 35 years.

Seventeen of the 21 women brought a total of 27 children with them, whose ages ranged from nine months to 14 years. Fifty-nine per cent of these children were five years of age and under.

Educational levels were recorded for 19 of the women and of these, 63% had completed high school, including three who attended university. Three had grade school only.

Job experience listings paralleled those in the larger group. These included: waitress, factory and office/clerical workers, houseworkers, chambermaid, kitchen aide, sewing, mail sorting, hairdresser, cannery, keypunch operators, teachers, and social workers.

In the area of financial resources, six listed Social Assistance; four were dependent on their husbands; three listed jobs; two were on Unemployment Insurance; four indicated a combination - e.g. working plus dependent on husband; one had no resources; and there was no record in one instance.

Nine of the 21 women provided additional information: their husbands' occupations or employment status. These included: two "outside" workers employed by the City; a mechanic; a salesman; a truck driver; a bus driver; one professional athlete; and a lawyer. One husband was unemployed.

Fourteen of the 21 women interviewed indicated battering as a reason for being at the House, either as the sole reason or in conjunction with others. Fifteen mentioned psychological abuse, again, either alone or in combination. Two women indicated they were there for housing needs.

In summary, Transition House residents came from diverse circumstances and socio-economic status. Like most Canadian women, many of them are economically dependent on their husbands or have skills or training that equip them for the lower-paid occupations and, thus, they are vulnerable to poverty.

IV.C. Circumstances and Gonsequences of Wife Battering

IV.C.1. Background to Assaults:

(a) Family Background:

The predominant picture of the family that emerges from Transition House residents' accounts is that it is a violent institution in which children and adults are at least unhappy, and frequently are actually assaulted. However, it is important to note that not all women who have suffered violence in their marriages are the product of violent homes. Neither had all the men, who as adults assaulted their wives, experienced violence in their parental home.

Our informants' descriptions of experiencing family violence vary. For most women and men the violence was direct - their fathers beat them as children. In almost all of these cases, they had also witnessed their mothers being beaten by their fathers, or stepfathers, with the mothers' subsequent death occuring in three cases. Several women said they had been sexually assaulted by their fathers or stepfathers.

Women's comments on their husbands' backgrounds reveal that many of these men had beaten their own parents, or their previous wives, and some had a record of violent behaviour outside the family.

Of the 104 women residents of Transition House who were asked about a violent family background, 50 indicated there had been violence in either their own or their husbands' parental homes. Twenty-one said there had not been any such violence; two women disagreed with their husbands' view that there had been no violence in their families, referring to violent undertones the women were aware of. Thirty-one did not comment.

The most often reported case of family violence that the women had experienced was assault by their fathers, stepfathers or by their mothers' boyfriends:

> My stepfather hated me and beat me lots of times. He would kick me and whip me with a skipping rope so that my legs were so bruised that I couldn't wear skirts to school. Then I'd get in trouble with the school because in those days you didn't wear pants to school.

In some cases the assault was sexual. One woman said she had been beaten by her father, and since she was 15 years old, forced to have sex with him. Another said that her stepfather raped her when she was 13.

For most women who were physically beaten, an awareness that their mother was also beaten was part of their childhood experience. One woman described her father as a "strangely charming" man to outsiders (a characteristic many batterers exhibit, according to Transition House staff), but noted that he drank a lot and gambled. She described her mother as a strong, silent, hardworking woman:

> I can remember my mother sharing her problems with me when I was 12 years old. I would sit with her crying over things like the bills...When she was going to leave my father he slit her throat...In our childhood we knew nothing but terror.

And another resident told the interviewer her father beat her and her mother "a lot" and, in fact, killed her mother during a beating.

Many women referred to "a lot of fights" between their parents without specifying incidents. One said that "sometimes there was violence but it wasn't extreme"; another described her father as "a physically violent man."

Most of the women who reported there had been violence in their husbands' families said it took the form of the father beating the mother. One woman explained her husband's extremely violent feelings towards his father because, when he was seven, he had seen his father burn his mother in the fireplace.

In addition, many women reported that their husbands' had said they'd been beaten as children by either a mother or a father.

The husband's violence towards either his mother or his father was also noted by many women. One woman said her husband beat his mother and that his father made excuses for him. Another said her husband beat his father, a man confined to a wheelchair.

Several other women referred to "lots of violence" in their husbands' family, one woman specifying that her husband beat his sister. Another said her husband's mother had warned her not to marry her son because he was so violent.

Of those informants who said there had not been actual violence in either family, several described unhappy childhoods due to their parents' money problems, or drinking, or not caring for the children. In some cases, this resulted in the children being removed to foster homes or institutions. Two women reported that their husbands don't talk about their families: one husband is seeing a psychiatrist to work out his feelings toward his family, and another is ashamed of his family and denies their existence to his wife.

However, several women we interviewed did comment positively on their family life, with descriptions ranging from "terrific" to "okay." Only two women reported favourably on their husband's family life.

Clearly violence was a major feature of many Transition House residents' parental homes and those of their husbands. Data presented by Levens,in The Social Service Role of Police: Domestic Crisis Intervention, indicate that for a large number of Canadians the family is a violent institution. The author cites Statistics Canada documentation that "between 1968-1974, 37.3% of all murder incidents were classified as domestic" and "in B.C. alone in the same period, 33.4% of murders were of a domestic nature." (Monograph 3, July 1977, p.4 footnote).

One widespread theory of wife-battering contends that violence is generational, that violent men and battered women "grew up in violent families where they witnessed violence or were victims of violence as children. Therefore, the child is socialized to accept violence as normal, appropriate behaviour in a marriage." (MacLeod, 1980, p.24). However, battered women's accounts reported in this research - showing that approximately 20% had not experienced violence in their parental homes - mitigates against such a generalization.

These accounts draw attention to the complexity of the issue. Violence is not perpetuated from generation to generation in all cases. In addition, men and women who were beaten as children respond differently: men become husbands who beat their wives; women become battered wives. Furthermore, as we will see in the discussion of women's expectations of marriage (page 50), whether their own family background was violent or not, most women expected that their marriages would be good.

The theory that violence is communicated generationally overgeneralizes. Still, this theory and the women's comments on family background do provide clear justification for stopping the violence. What must be broken down is what MacLeod in Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle calls the immunity of the family from the laws of the society. (MacLeod, 1980, p.29).

(b) Women's Expectations of Marriage:

During the interviews, Transition House residents were asked about their hopes and expectations of marriage. Their responses reveal their reasons for getting married or for living with their common-law husbands. These include pressure from parents or their family upbringing; the fact that they were pregnant and, therefore, felt they should get married; and the good qualities they saw in their prospective husbands. At the same time, many women's lack of control over the decision to marry also emerges from the interviews. Yet regardless of the reasons for the marriage, a significant finding is the positive expectations most women had of what their marriages would be like. Women's expectations of marriage provide a setting for the abuse and assaults that eventuated.

Since many of the women who were interviewed for this study were themselves raised in violent or unhappy parental homes, it is not surprising that escape from their families or a desire to have a different life played a part in their reasons for getting married. They chose as a partner someone they believed would give them that better life.

> I got married mostly because I wanted to get away from my family.
>
> My parents didn't fit the stereotyped image of what a man and a woman should be and that bothered me. I wanted a normal family like everyone else. Possibly for this reason I was married at 24 to 'Mr. Average.' I wanted to be middle of the road. He was a deliberate choice for that reason.

Seeking the approval of one or both parents was another reason women married. One woman, who had sensed disapproval from her parents, said that when she got married, "Finally my mother was happy about me, she loved me finally, she took me out shopping to buy a dress." Another said she got married when she was pregnant because "It looks good in family standings."

In contrast, some women married in spite of their parents' disapproval of their choice of husband.

Several women said they got married because they were pregnant. One woman commented:

> We got together because I got pregnant. We'd made a mistake and we felt we had to pay for it.

Another said when her husband is angry he tells her he married her because she was pregnant.

Some women indicated they felt they had little or no choice about getting married or living with their partners - as the following comments illustrate:

> He insisted on moving in with me when I got pregnant.

> He threatened to end the relationship if we didn't get married. All I was concerned about was that I was madly in love with him.

One woman said she had lived for only two weeks with the man who considers himself to be her husband. She did not want to continue living with him because he beat her severely. However, although she got a restraining order against him, he broke into her apartment repeatedly and assaulted her:

> He would never leave me alone. As far as he's concerned I'm his wife because we've known each other for six months. I told him no many times.

Another woman said hers was an arranged marriage over which she had no control, "His mother and my mother made it up. I never knew him."

For many women, however, their decision or acceptance of marriage was influenced by good qualities exhibited by the men with whom they were involved, or by needs the men had which they felt they could meet. Some women described their men as secure, stable, understanding, kind, considerate; one noted that "He was good to me when I was sick," another that "He didn't drink." For others, it was the man's loneliness or sadness that attracted them

Several women said they learned soon after their marriages that their husbands had lied during courtship about their finances or employment status. In most cases, women were unclear about the timing or causes of changes in their husbands. However, one said her husband became bitter as a result of his service in the Army and another noted that her husband's behaviour towards her changed when he began to drink excessively. However, some women told the interviewers that in looking back they realize that their husbands showed negative qualities - such as drinking, gambling, a bad temper, or even a record of violent behaviour - that they had overlooked when they got married or believed they could change. One extreme example is the woman who said she agreed to marry her husband - because she "felt sorry for him; he had so many problems" and she thought she could help him - in spite of his threats of violence:

> One night I got home from work and he said, 'Will you marry me?' I said 'Yes.' He told me, 'If you hadn't said yes I would have killed you' - and he picked up a loaded gun from under the couch.

It is significant that nearly all the women who were interviewed, whatever their reasons for getting married or their backgrounds, had very positive expectations of marriage. Most expected to be loved and to love in return; to have companionship and trust; and to share a happy life together raising their children. Others married hoping to keep their freedom or to gain a freedom they had not had in their parental home. Two informants specified that they expected a good marriage like their parents had.

The exceptions are women who said they did not know what to expect of marriage or were simply "willing to take a chance."

To take a closer look, it is clear that our informants' expectations of marriage, which were primarily positive, reflect the values of our society. They are common to most women. Marriage is held up to every young girl as the ideal, a central role for a woman if not the key to her identity, and a fundamental goal she should attain. As one woman, who married in order "to fit in," said, getting married "makes you feel important." For all of our informants, however, their hopes and expectations were not realized. One woman's comment captures the situation of many when she says of her marriage of 34 years: "What did I expect? Well, I sure didn't expect what I got."

(c) Descriptions of Marriage:

In order to understand more clearly the context in which wife battering occurs, Transition House residents were asked during the interviews to comment on what their marriages were like generally; that is, aside from the violence they'd experienced. It is significant that psychological abuse, which is reported in more detail later in this chapter, figured prominently in their descriptions.

Although their marriages did not live up to their expectations, informants' accounts indicate there were positive features. Some women said that under certain limited circumstances, their husbands treated them well. One informant, for example, said her husband was good to her while she was pregnant, noting that she had lost two babies in the past, "So he would help me to take it easy when I was pregnant." Another said her husband was a nice man when he wasn't drinking.

For the most part, however, women reported that their work of household management and childcare was not appreciated by their husbands. In many cases, their husbands' irresponsibility with regard to their children or the families' finances were major problems in their marriages. Others suffered enforced isolation because of their husbands. And, in some instances the husband's violence extended outside the home.

Many women felt that their husbands devalued the work of managing the house and taking care of the children. As noted by one woman, who had been married twice and noticed the same attitude in both her husbands: "What I hated most...is they never thought I was fit to talk to adults because I stayed home with the kids all day. They both figured taking care of the kids was a bed of roses." And others reported that no matter how much work they did inside the home or outside (in some cases, working without pay in their husband's business), the work was criticized as insufficient or inadequate; for example, food prepared for dinner would be called "slop" and pushed off the table. Or the husband inspected the tops of doors for dust and inspected the woman's closets and dresser drawers to ensure that all her clothes were arranged neatly. This devaluation of women's work is a major aspect of psychological abuse.

One informant gave a positive assessment of her husband's relationship with their children: "He is a good father to the children. He's very responsible about them." Another woman said her husband "Really loves his kids, but sometimes when he's been drinking he doesn't know his own strength."

Several women spoke of discipline problems with their children. Disagreements focussed on who had the right to mete out discipline or punishment, the mother or the father, and on the severity required. One woman, for example, described intervening to stop her husband from beating their five year old son with a stick, and another woman said she stopped her husband from screaming at and shaking their baby. In some cases the woman's intervention, when the husband was punishing their child, resulted in the woman being beaten. The husbands' aims overall seemed to be to establish their control in a situation rather than to ensure the welfare of the children. If their wives questioned their methods, then the women were punished as well.

Some women described specific cases of their husbands' telling the children to have no respect for their mothers: "I remember him pointing at me and my mother and telling the child, 'Hate her, hate them'." Several other women said their husbands took no responsibility for the children.

In almost all cases, those women who commented on the financial aspect of their marriage identified it as a major problem. The most frequently reported difficulties were: husbands who ran up large debts with creditors; husbands' refusing to give their wives money to pay household bills and buy clothes for the children; and gambling.

One woman said that although her husband was "making a good salary," they were evicted from every place they lived "either because of not paying the rent or violence. He never gave me any money. After boozing, maybe he'd give me what was left over for food. He'd expect money to come from nowhere for groceries and rent."

Another woman's account illustrates the conflict many women reported regarding their husbands' exercise of financial control:

> Money, that's a laugh. Well, we were on Welfare, but even when I was working he'd get my money. He used to sponge off his dad too. He spent money like a kid. He'd spend 50, 60, 80 dollars on toys; he had dinky toys, a really expensive train and models. He spent lots of money on models. He would always argue that it was his hobby. He used to come shopping with me and pay for the food so he didn't have to give me money. Then he would give me maybe $2.00 for milk for the baby. I used to say '$2.00 isn't enough for milk for the baby for a month.'

Another woman described having to justify to her husband how she'd spent every cent he gave her for the household bills. Then she had to deal with his creditors too:

> He owes a lot of money to creditors and individuals. He would always deny to me that he owed it and I would deal with them. I always believed him, I always backed him up. When I'd find out he was lying I'd feel like an idiot.

Insisting that purchases made on credit were in the woman's name was a technique one man used to avoid his creditors. Two women pointed out that it was fortunate they had their own economic resources to pay for rent, food, and utilities.

Many husbands desired to isolate their wives. This became extreme in numerous cases, as noted in the discussion of psychological abuse later in this chapter. The pattern is revealed in comments such as:

> We did get along okay when no one was around. It felt comfortable and secure then.

> He was a real homebody. He was very protective of me. In fact, he wanted to keep me all to myself...He never wanted to take me out with his crowd.

Several women reported that their husbands were violent men who not only assaulted their wives and children but also acquaintances or strangers. One woman said her husband "used to get into fights in restaurants and bars." Another described her husband's fighting with a man at a football game:

> He got mad and he pounded the guy until he would have killed him. My husband's friends who took him away from the guy were scared - one won't be his friend anymore.

Verbal abusiveness towards others was a characteristic of several informants' husbands. In general, such abuse is directed at other men, although one woman who said her husband "easily gets into verbal fights with other men" added that he also has "a low opinion of all women." Another woman described her husband getting into "vicious arguments "in bars, noting that,"If it wasn't me, it was someone else."

In summary, some of our informants had experienced violence in their parental homes; others had not. Many married to escape unhappy backgrounds, while several hoped to replicate their parents' good marriages.

Their expectations of marriage, largely positive and optimistic, were not fulfilled whether they married men from happy or unhappy backgrounds. Although their husbands' violence against them was a major problem in their marriages, there were usually attendant problems. These related to the devaluation of women's work in the home, childcare, or money. In some cases, they resulted from their husbands' violence outside the home.

IV.C.2. Physical Assaults:

In examining the assaults women reported to our researchers, we begin with their descriptions of physical violence. It is important to be clear about what physical violence actually is - what it consists of.

Informants described a range of physically violent actions they had been subjected to by their husbands. More than half of the women interviewed said they'd been punched in the face and mouth. One woman said she always had black eyes; another reported she was always hit in the face but said, "If I covered up I'd get it everywhere."

Others described:

- being kicked, burned, shaken, slapped, hit in the head or face;
- being pushed into a wall, down stairs, onto the floor, out of a car;
- being beaten unconscious; being strangled to the point of unconsciousness.

Several women said their husbands threw things at them including dishes, a case of beer, a plate of spaghetti, and cups of coffee. One woman said her husband had beaten her with the burner rack from the stove, shoved a key into her ear, cracked her head open, and pulled out chunks of her hair.

Others reported being threatened with a knife, a gun, a bottle of acid. One woman said she didn't keep any knives or scissors in the house, but her husband would "break bottles and threaten me." Several other women were less specific in their accounts, indicating that their husbands had threatened to kill them and/or their children.

It is clear from these reports that the violent actions ranged from what could be considered impulsive acts, such as throwing things, to more extreme acts of torture and attempted murder.

A review of information from our total population (including residents who were interviewed) shows not only the range of violent actions women suffered but also the physical consequences of the assaults. The nature of injuries inflicted was recorded by 72 of the 97 women who indicated battering as a reason for being at Transition House.

The injuries reported are listed below, with each line representing a different woman. This is not a complete list of all the injuries Transition House residents had suffered; in many cases the women simply stated the injuries that first came to mind when they were asked by researchers. This took place soon after their arrival at Transition House, when the women responded to the research file sheet. The list follows:

Bruises
Black eyes, body bruises
Operation scar split open, head injuries
Bruises
Broken nose, head cuts, bruises
Black eyes, stabbed in leg, bruises
Head injuries, ear infection, broken leg bone
Head injuries
Broken arm, cuts, bruises
Head injuries, black eyes
Head stitches, broken leg, bruises
Split head, bruises
Punctured ear-drum, bruises
Bruises - kicked
Bruises
Black eyes, bruises
Broken ribs, cuts and bruises
Head hit repeatedly, badly bruised shoulders
Bruised face and arms
Black eye, bruises, hair pulled out
Black eyes, bleeding nose, bruises
Bruises
Bruises
Black eyes, bruises
Bruises, hair pulled out
Bleeding nose, bruises
Broken arm, ribs, hands (boots used)
Cut mouth and arm
Punched head, bruises, poked in thigh with iron rod
Broken nose, arm, and ribs, black eyes
Blows to head, neck, and shoulders
Bruised face
Dislocated neck, spine, collar-bone
Bruises
Choked, head injuries, teeth damage
Cracked head, black eyes, cuts, bruises
Bruises
Nose bleeding from head hit against wall
Head hit against wall, bruises
Black eye, lip cut
Broken teeth, black eye, bruised ribs
Scrapes on back of head
Tooth lost, sore leg

Knife slashes
Bruises and scratches
Stitches, fractured ribs
Headaches, strained ankle
Bruises
Bruises
Head and face injuries
Broken tooth, back injury
Back bruises
Black eyes, swollen lip
Fractured foot, torn ligaments
Knife wound on arm
Collar-bone and leg injuries
Injured ear-drum
Possible fractured skull, dislocated shoulder, bruises
Broken nose and thumb, bruises and cuts
Knife wounds, fractures, burns
Hole in ear-drum, black eyes
Black eyes, nose and back injuries
Broken and cracked ribs, many bruises
Cut lips and ears, many head injuries, bruises everywhere
Jaw and cheek injuries
Bruises and need for psychiatric care
Broken ribs
Bruises
Sore back from kicking
Head injuries, head put through wall
Gash on head
Cracked rib, black eyes, bruises.

It is clear that wife battering is not, contrary to popular belief, simply a matter of an occasional slap. Apart from the physical pain inflicted, many of the injuries were severe enough to require medical treatment.

Transition House residents were asked what medical treatment they'd received.* Of the 84 residents for whom clear responses were recorded, 52 women (61.9%) had received professional medical treatment. In many cases, women reported that they'd gone to a hospital or seen a doctor more than once. Responses included "several times," "often," ten times, and seven times in one year. Several residents said they had treated themselves on occasion, in addition to, or instead of, seeking professional attention. One woman reported not seeking medical care because she was afraid she would have to lay charges if she did so. Another woman said her husband had not allowed her to get treatment.

Residents indicated that the assaults had begun at different stages in their relationships, and had occured with varying degrees of frequency.

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*Research File Sheet questions regarding medical treatement were revised three times. See Introduction, page 6 .

Of the 89 women who indicated when in their relationships the physical assaults began[1], 40 (or 45%) reported it was at or near the start. Twelve (or 30%) of these women had been married for ten years or more. (We have not included in this number the women who did not specify a time period but referred to pregnancy or child-birth as the beginning of the violence. If these references were included the numbers and percentages, cited above, would probably be even higher). Six women indicated the battering began about halfway into their relationships and 18 said the assaults were a recent occurrence.

Of the 85 women, who indicated how often they had been assaulted, 53 (62.3%) were beaten often and/or regularly.[2] A sample of women's comments regarding the frequency of assaults is provided in the following list:

four times (in a year and a half)
once every 3 or 4 months (in a year and a quarter)
not too often
occasionally
eight times
about every six months(over four years)
about once a year (over nine years)
very often
lately more often
frequently
every couple of months
whenever he got mad
when money runs out
every few weeks
regularly, recently
about twice a month - on payday
three or four times a month
too many times to remember
every week
every weekend
every Friday night
twice a week
about every third day
one to five times weekly
every few days
every two to three days
sometimes every day
now every day
all the time
almost every night
every day for the last month

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1. See Appendix II for a chart that provides more detailed information on when the assaults began.

2. See Appendix III for a chart that provides more detailed information on the frequency of assaults.

Women's accounts show the dimensions of wife battering. Their husbands had hit them in the head and face, punched or kicked them, stabbed them and, in some cases, tried to murder them. The assaults resulted in bruises, broken bones, internal injuries, torn ligaments and dislocated joints. For many women the assaults had begun early in their marriages; for others, only recently. For some, their husbands' assaults were a regular occurrence, every day, each week; others were assaulted sporadically.

Gillian Walker pointed out in "Grounding Assumptions about Violence and the Family" (MacLeod (ed.), 1979, Appendix III), that "a woman does not deserve to be beaten, no matter what she does. Nobody deserves beating, ever." Indeed, in view of the descriptions of assault and the injuries Transition House residents reported to researchers, excuses or justifications for wife battering are irrelevant.

(a) What Prompted the Assaults:

Social service, medical, and justice system workers, all those who encounter the reality of wife battering in their work see the consequences of these assaults. They are anxious to understand why such violence is done. In this research we focus on the accounts of women who have themselves been battered. In the interviews conducted for this report, Transition House residents commented on why they thought they had been beaten, what their husbands gave as reasons, and how their husbands reacted after the assaults. Since no beating is justified, any explanation for physical assault is a rationalization. Nevertheless, informants' comments do provide insights into the circumstances and consequences of the assaults.

Although some informants said they simply did not know why they were beaten, others tried to explain why it happened. They cited jealousy, financial problems, his drinking, or arguments between them, as reasons for the assaults. One woman said her husband "took it out on" her when he was angry with other people; for example, a taxi driver he felt was trying to "rip him off." Another said she was hit or beaten when her husband "didn't get his way."

Several women suggested that perhaps they were at least partly to blame: "I probably got bitchy," or "It was our lifestyle." However, as we will see in reviewing women's futile attempts to stop the violence against them by changing their own behaviour (Section V.A.), women's behaviour does not adequately account for the assaults. That some women assumed responsibility for the violence they experienced is part of the larger responsibility women generally take for every aspect of their marriage.

Several reported the reasons their husbands gave for assaulting them. One informant stated that her husband said he "just got angry," but she added that he was worried about money and had "problems at work." This informant went on to say that her husband told her if she would "shut up, he'd stop." Other women said they were beaten for "talking back." In one instance, a woman noted that her husband's family urged him to punish her, in order to show her "who's the boss":

> He felt he had to do it. When I would talk back to him, [his family] would say, 'Are you going to put up with that?' So he would slap me.

One woman said her husband could not remember why he beat her; another said he could not control it.

Some women indicated that their husbands were sorry afterwards although one said that after the first few violent incidents he was apologetic, but "Then he began to mock me about it: 'Oh, black eyes look good on you'" and threatened, "'Next time I'll give you a better one.'"

One man, according to his wife, begged her not to report him to the police after he had beaten her. Another couldn't understand why his wife had called the police.

One informant said her husband followed up his assaults on her with threats to hurt her more. One man reportedly denied his responsibility totally and told his wife that she had hurt and bruised herself.

Clearly, the preceding comments touch on many of the most common theories and explanations of wife battering. The diversity of the comments, however, prompt further questioning. More comprehensive information is found in the women's description of the specific circumstances of the violence they'd suffered. Many of these descriptions focused on when the violence began. In the following review of these accounts, patterns emerge. A husband's reaction to his wife's pregnancy and a concomitant jealousy of the impending child is cited as a key factor by several women. Financial problems, including the husband's refusal to provide the necessary funds for the family's needs, is another widely reported factor. Third, and most prevalent, is the matter of control - i.e. violence resulting from the husband's frustrated desire to exercise absolute control over his wife's behaviour. This embraces all aspects, including her work in the home, caring for the family and maintaining the household, her social life and contacts through work outside the home, or her family.

(b) How it Happened:

For most of the Transition House residents interviewed for this report, assaults occurred when their husbands felt that their authority or control over their wives was being challenged or threatened. In some cases, the challenge was direct and obvious; for example, women told their husbands they would not accept their rules or decisions. In other instances, the husband interpreted his wife's behaviour to be a challenge because she failed to comply totally with the standards he demanded. An illustration of this is the case of a woman who was eight months pregnant and had just moved into a new apartment with her husband. She was cleaning and unpacking their belongings when she was beaten for not cleaning and unpacking fast enough. Clearly, it was impossible for her to conform to his standards.

For many women, "talking back ," complaining about not having a social life, teasing, or coming home late from seeing a movie, precipitated violence by their husbands. Frequently, women indicated they were not aware that their behaviour had constituted a challenge to their husbands' authority:

> One time I had a girlfriend over and maybe he was jealous. He tripped me and pushed me down on the floor in the bathroom.
>
> Once I yelled at him in the backyard and one of the neighbours heard me. When we got into the house he slapped my face. His reason was that I had embarrassed him.

Another informant reported that she had been sick and exhausted after her daughter was born. Her husband tried to quiet the baby who was crying a lot: "He was screaming at her and shaking her. I ran in and asked him what he was doing. That insulted him so he hit me across the face and kicked me. I was so shocked!"

Overt refusal to comply with their husbands' demands, either because they were unable or unwilling to, also resulted in a violent attack for many women. One informant reported arguing in a bar with her husband, who had beaten her repeatedly in the past. She refused to go home with him:

> I wouldn't go because I knew I'd get a licking. He slipped my coat on me and I slipped out of it. I tried to run to the police station, but I didn't make it. I woke up a few days later in the hospital. I'd been in a coma.

Another woman said that on one occasion, when she was nine months pregnant, her husband brought home a friend she didn't like:

> I asked my husband to have him as a friend outside the house. He said, 'It's my house!' His friend ordered me to make food for him and I said, 'This is not a restaurant.' My husband beat me for that. I began having contractions and I had to call a taxi for myself to go to the hospital. My husband sat watching T.V.

In other cases, a woman was assaulted for refusing to wash her husband's back, for walking away from him when he was talking, or for suggesting, the day after their wedding, that their friends would understand if she didn't entertain them.

These accounts illustrate a dominant theme in informants' reports of assault: when a husband perceives that his authority is being challenged by his wife's actions, she suffers violent consequences unwarranted by her behaviour. In our society, men traditionally have the right to make and enforce the rules within marriage. In fact, society's entrenchment of this right is clearly a contributing factor to wife battering. In Chapter V of this report, we discuss how legal, medical and social service institutions uphold male authority in marriage.

In describing the circumstances of assault to our researchers, many Transition House residents noted that the beatings were associated with their pregnancies or that "things got worse" when their children were born.

For several women, the assaults began when they were pregnant; for many others, the assaults increased in severity during pregnancy. For example:

> The first severe beating was when I was six months pregnant. He kicked me and pushed me into a ditch... He had hit me before though.
>
> I got pregnant and one night we had a fight. He threw me down three flights of stairs...I lost the baby.

Some women offered explanations for their husbands' violent reactions to pregnancy. One suggested her husband was angry because he was afraid she wouldn't continue to hold her job. In fact, she worked every day until three days before the baby was born. Other women believed their husbands resented their being pregnant because they were jealous of their wives' time and attention being focused elsewhere. One woman said her husband thought she was "obsessed with the idea of being pregnant" because she saw the doctor regularly, stopped smoking, and generally took good care of herself.

As noted above, in some instances the husbands' assaults of their pregnant wives caused miscarriages. In other cases, women were encouraged to abort. One woman said:

> He made me cry every day when I was pregnant with my first baby...He told me twice to take a hot shower to get rid of the baby.

And another informant reported that she had three abortions in three years because her husband was so jealous of the time she spent with the children and didn't want her to have any more.

Frequently, women noted that their husbands' assaults began when their children were born:

> The beatings started when the baby was one month old.
>
> The beatings were not very frequent until my child was born...His mother moved in with us...He told friends that I should go out and work and let his mother stay home to look after the baby.

Very often the difficulties related to the birth of children also entailed disputes about money:

> I got pregnant and I asked him what he wanted me to do - have the baby or what. He told me not to worry but he'd never give me money for milk for the baby - nothing. We argued about that and he used to shake me and shake me.

Women reported being beaten when they asked their husbands for money for children's clothes or for groceries for the family. One woman attributed the beginnings of her husband's violence against her to the financial pressures of having several children to care for, noting that her husband did not want the responsibility.

Financial problems were seen as the root of their husbands' violence in several cases. Women described being assaulted when they refused to deal any longer with their husbands' creditors; when their husbands were unemployed or not working steadily and bills piled up; or when their husbands had spent all their household money on drinking or gambling. Others said they were beaten when "the money runs out" or "twice a month - on payday."

It is important to note that financial problems occurred not exclusively as a result of low or no income. On the contrary. In many cases, the husband had a more than adequate income but put a low priority on household and family needs, or mismanaged money and ran up debts.

Husbands' jealousy was another factor several women identified. As noted earlier, many husbands were jealous of their wives' attention to their children. In addition, jealousy of their wives' having women friends and of other men paying attention to their wives was, in some cases, a contributing factor to the violence.

One informant, who said her husband hit her in public several times "for mouthing off," also commented on her husband's jealousy, noting that "he slapped a guy in the mouth who said I was a nice lady!" Another woman said of her first husband: "The thing that made him so mad was when I would go out with other women...One night when I went out with some women friends, he broke my son's arm."

One informant who said her husband beat her "all the time" indicated that she couldn't understand her husband's jealousy. She described how he set up situations in which he would be jealous:

> He used to bring home these single guys...Then he would make a big thing about that any man who came through the door came to see me, not him. I ended up having to feed them and do all the work, then he would be mad because he imagined they were interested in me, and yet he brought them there in the first place.

Their husbands' jealousy was obviously confusing for many women. The same man who jealously regarded his wife as a unique and important person to him, beat her, as if she were a mere commodity, entirely dispensable.

Although the Research File Sheet, administered to each Transition House resident for this project, did not include a specific question regarding circumstances of assault, 31 (or 22%) of the residents did mention alcohol abuse as a factor. Approximately half made a direct connection between drunkenness and assaults. From the resident interviews, which provided an opportunity for more complete descriptions of assault, it is clear that drinking could be considered a major or precipitating factor in the assaults in two cases.

One woman said that her husband had "always been drinking" when he beat her, although the assaults were prompted by her refusals to behave as he wanted. Another said that "the trouble really began" when, after five years of marriage, her husband started drinking. Then he would become violent if she refused to have sex with him.

In all other cases, the husbands' alcohol abuse was not a consistent feature of the circumstances of assault. Sometimes the husbands had been drinking when they beat their wives, but not always. Several Transition House workers told researchers that alcohol is given disproportionate attention as a feature of wife battering. They pointed out that men use drunkenness to absolve themselves of blame for the beatings. Women often accept unquestioningly that "if he was drunk he won't remember what he's done; so perhaps he didn't mean to beat her up." One worker reflected many workers' views when she said, "Wife battering is not the work of a few crazy, drunk men." Several workers pointed out that alcohol does not cause wife battering; as one said,"Alcohol gives permission [for husbands] to do what they want to do anyway."

In summary, women's accounts present a variety of circumstances surrounding their husbands' physical assaults of them. Challenges to the man's authority, his reaction to his wife's pregnancy or the birth of their child, financial problems, or his jealousy - all produced an unwarranted and violent response. Attempts at negotiation to resolve conflicts between himself and his wife are noticeably absent.

The picture that emerges of the men involved shows that, on the one hand, they demand respect and adherence to their authority in marriage while on the other, they are unwilling or unable to deal with the attendant responsibilities. The husband's authority appears to be absolute: he does not earn it by being a good provider or effective manager of the household, and he does not endeavour to resolve conflicts in a rational manner. Instead, violence is the instrument used to uphold men's socially ascribed authority over their wives.

IV.C.3. Psychological Abuse:

Psychological abuse is a term that is widely used in research and writing about wife battering. Generally, it covers husbands' verbal violence towards their wives, as distinct from physical assaults. In designing the research file sheet (administered to all Transition House residents during this research project), we accepted the term and included it as one category of "reasons for being at Transition House." However, we discovered early in the research process that many residents, who had indicated psychological abuse alone, or together with housing, as reasons for coming to Transition House, and who did not indicate physical battering, had in fact been physically injured by their husbands.

Transition House workers suggested that this may have occurred because women are reluctant to admit that they have been beaten. Or it may not have been an actual physical assault, but rather the psychological abuse or build-up of tensions that often precedes beating, that prompted them to come to Transition House this time.

We decided to revise the research file sheet to provide space for women's descriptions of psychological abuse, in order to be clearer about what it is. In addition, space was provided for their comments on ways they were isolated from friends, family, community, etc., which was considered by Transition House workers to be a major aspect of psychological abuse. One hundred and four residents were asked to comment on pyschological abuse and isolation.

The residents' comments from the research file sheets concerning psychological abuse and isolation have been analyzed, along with the comments of those 21 women who were interviewed in greater depth. They reveal a picture of psychological abuse that husbands use as a means of control over their wives. It takes the form of:

(a) physical isolation - husbands isolate their wives from friends, relatives, and the community by means of threats, accusations, and verbal abuse of friends/relatives, as well as by depriving their wives of the access to the means of developing social contacts, e.g. money,time. etc.;

(b) insults, criticisms, accusations designed to undermine women's work, self-respect, and their sanity;

and (c) threats of beatings and murder.

As in the case of physical assault, the fact that men have the social right to make the rules within marriage provides the basis for much of the psychological abuse women experience. Men seek to maximize their control over their wives by invoking fear, levelling insults, criticisms or accusations at them, and isolating them.

(a) Isolation:

Isolation emerges as a predominant feature of psychological abuse. Of the 70 women who commented on isolation only seven said they had not experienced it.

Most informants commented on the rules their husbands imposed on them. The women were virtual prisoners at home, and were not allowed to visit with friends, neighbours or relatives. In some cases, they were forbidden to even speak to them. Women reported being able to go out only with their husbands, never alone, and to socialize only with friends of their husbands. One woman was prevented from going to Church. Others said their husbands didn't like the women's families and therefore, they were not allowed to write or telephone their relatives. One woman said she was not permitted to use the telephone at all and that her husband required a detailed accounting of all her activities. Another informant, said that if she talked to anyone, or left the house - for example to take language classes - or, even opened the window drapes, her husband beat her.

To enforce these rules, the men used a variety of methods. As noted above, physical violence was one. Some husbands threatened, for example:

> The only freedom I had was when I went to work. When I was late coming home he had a bottle of acid to throw at me.

Several women said they were locked out of the house if they went out with women friends or came home late. In one case, "late" was defined by the husband as after 8:30 p.m.

Other husbands harassed their wives if they did go out. As one woman reported:

> When I went to visit the neighbours next door, he would bang on the wall between the suites to get me to come home to change the T.V. channel.

Accusations of sexual infidelity figure prominently as a device used by many men to try to ensure adherence to their rules of isolation. One man accused his wife's friends of encouraging her to see other men. Another "warned" the neighbours that his wife would go to bed with their husbands. Many women said their husbands accused them of infidelity if they had friends or went out:

> He let me work for a while but when I started making friends I had to quit. If I had women friends, they were 'no-good lesbians'; if I had men friends, they were screwing me.
>
> We'd be sitting in a bar and suddenly the guy near me [whom] I'd never met before, was my lover. I can't talk or be happy with him around. I was used to communicating with people but he'd find something to be angry about.

In numerous cases, husbands reportedly criticized their wives' choice of friends, for example, "None of my friends are any good." They drove the friends away by criticizing them directly or by making their visits uncomfortable. This technique was effective in isolating women, as evidenced by several informants' reports that their husbands' rudeness, "dirty talk," "insane jealousy," or alcohol abuse prompted relatives and friends to stop visiting.

Isolation was unavoidable for many women because their husbands denied them the money or time for social activities. In many cases a double standard was operative: the husband was free to socialize and spend money on entertainment while the wife wasn't. One woman reports working at two jobs in order to buy food and clothing for herself and the children, because her husband would only contribute towards their mortgage payments. She was also expected to run the household, and had no time for friends or entertainment. Meanwhile, her husband gave gifts and money to his women friends. Another woman described a problem several others referred to. Her husband wouldn't give her any money for transportation or recreation, and he took no responsibility for the children, so she was unable to socialize:

> I had to take the children everywhere with me. And my husband wouldn't give me money for bus fare when it was possible to take the children.

Some informants offered explanations for their husbands' desire to keep them isolated, such as "he's shy," "he's jealous," "my parents and friends are against him so I don't visit them," or "he's mentally ill." One woman pointed to the fact that they were poor and, therefore, had very few friends. Another said her husband did shift work, "So I always had to be quiet and couldn't have friends over." A third reported, "We moved around all the time, always lived in isolated places."

It is clear from the accounts of most women, however, that they were deliberately and systematically isolated by their husbands. In addition, it is important to remember that most of the women who suffered isolation were also physically assaulted. Without ascribing specific motives to their husbands, that they kept their wives isolated because they didn't want it known they were beating them, the result is clear: women who are isolated are less likely to have access to or to seek outside help. Their fear of revealing to outsiders what has been happening to them inhibits them from seeking help. It is a vicious circle. They are, in fact, trapped in a violent environment.

(b) Insults, Criticisms, Accusations:

In addition to isolation, Transition House residents described other forms of psychological abuse they'd experienced. Insults, criticisms accusations and threats were reported by 63 of the 104 residents who were asked about psychological abuse. These are designed to assert the husbands' authority over the women, to control their wives' behaviour or undermine their work, self-respect and/or their sanity.

Verbal attacks very often focused on the women's competence in household maintenance and childcare. These insults demanded compliance with impossible, or frequently undeclared,standards or were simply total castigations of the women's efforts.

In many cases, the very work for which women are valued in society is the work men denigrated. Women reported their husbands' characterizing them as a "slack housekeeper," a "terrible cook," or criticisms such as, "I didn't do the floor clean enough," or "I don't know how to raise kids," "I'm not a good mother."

In many other cases everything the women did was criticized: "Everything that goes wrong is my fault "; "He told me I'm a complete slob "; "All I ever got was beaten or blamed."

One might infer from some of these comments that the men involved are concerned that their household be run well and their children well cared for. However, many women reported that their husbands refused to provide the funds necessary to accomplish or facilitate their work in the home. Money problems were, in fact, identified by several women as a key aspect of the psychological abuse they experienced. They were not given enough money or responsibility for financial decisions; furthermore, husbands often spent household funds on other things. It was then common in these cases for the husband to accuse his wife of mismanaging the family's money.

Many men's attempts to control their wives by abdicating financial responsibility and instead exerting financial pressure is illustrated by the following report:

> He stopped working when I got pregnant and he wouldn't give me money for food...After I miscarried he went back to work and has supported me ever since.

Not only was women's work in the home criticized by their husbands, women's outside employment was also devalued:

> He says I'm young and stupid because I don't make enough money, and he says he'll get a new wife.

Some women who were employed outside the home reported being required to give their husbands their whole salaries, with no money for their own needs. One woman said her bank account was taken away and all she received was a food allowance.

Furthermore, many husbands' expectations of the work their wives were to perform was all-encompassing. Their standards were impossible to meet, as this representative account shows:

> He expects me to do all the housework, childcare, answer his business phone, pick up even the heavy equipment for the business...He kicked me out once because I'd gone with a girlfried to look at a new house and therefore I wasn't answering his phone, though it was on an automatic recorder. And I wasn't home to find things for him or to go to the store for his cigarettes.

Other women commented on the range of duties they were expected to perform without any assistance from their husbands. For example:

> He treats me like a slave. And he won't help with anything around the house.
>
> He dictates to me what housework I should do.

From these accounts of psychological abuse, it is clear that the men involved see themselves as supervisors of the household. They require that their wives run it efficiently according to the husbands' standards - standards which are rarely articulated until the women fail to meet them. They are impossible to attain in any case with the limited funds made available. And the work women do both inside and outside the home is devalued.

Husbands' expectations that women take all the practical responsibility for childcare, without receiving the necessary financial support and assistance, is another feature of psychological abuse frequently reported by informants. Many women said their husbands would not give them the money needed to adequately provide for their children's needs. In addition, many husbands refused to take any responsibility for caring for the children. One woman reflected several other women's concerns when she described being afraid to leave their child in her husband's care for an evening. She knew that when she returned home, she'd find that the child had not been fed or had his diaper changed.

Men's lack of responsibility, however, did not inhibit them from criticizing their wives' competence to care for the children. In fact, womens' efforts to be effective parents were often undermined by their husbands' actions. Disputes over appropriate discipline is one widely reported problem. More blatant examples of men's undermining of their wives' parenting role are evident in women's accounts of being assaulted in their children's presence. For example, one woman said she was always beaten in front of the children; another said her husband made their 12 year old child watch when he beat her. Other cases include a husband who spit at his wife in front of their son and another who told the children the woman "sells herself to anyone."

In addition to denigrating their wives' competence, many husbands used psychological abuse to subvert women's self-image and self-respect. Insulting the women's appearance or behaviour was a frequent tactic.

Many women reported being described by their husbands as: "ugly," "a fat pig," "not attractive enough to go out in public with him," "stupid," "ignorant," "an old bag," "garbage," "a whore," "a slut." One woman said that if she did pay attention to her appearance, her husband would say she did it "for other men."

In some instances, these verbal attacks were apparently designed to remind the woman that she was dependent on her husband and that she was expendable. For example:

> He told me I'd never measure up to his ex-wife and that no one else wanted me.
>
> He said he was doing me a favour by staying with me. He told me he stayed because he felt sorry for me.

The many forms of psychological abuse described by informants often caused them to question their own sanity. Some spoke of hearing so frequently that everything was their fault that they began to doubt themselves.

For several women, their husbands' assaults were explicit challenges to their own rationality:

> He made all the decisions because he said I couldn't think for myself.

Many other women were told explicitly that they were insane:

> He called me 'crazy' all the time.
>
> He told me I was crazy. He used to tell me I hadn't seen things I thought I had.

One woman reported that her husband had her committed to a mental hospital when she was pregnant; she protested but although "He was drunk at the time, no one would listen to me."

Several women described their husbands' accusations; most were sexual: "He accused me of sleeping with everybody "; "He said my baby wasn't his."

Some women tried to refute these charges, but the accusations stood regardless of their validity. One woman said she'd been accused of having a hysterectomy "so I could have more sex"; she pointed out indignantly, "I had cancer!" Another woman, whose husband believed she had been unfaithful to him, also accused her of laying assault charges against him.

He wasn't convinced by evidence that she hadn't. Whatever the men's motivation for calling their wives to account for alleged misdeeds, their reported unwillingness to listen to their wives' responses to the charges demonstrates that the accusations are another form of abuse.

In brief, women's accounts of their husbands' insults, criticisms, and accusations illustrate the roles husbands expect men and women to fulfill. The man is the supervisor and evaluator, standing apart from the situation, passing judgement on all aspects of the woman's behaviour; the woman is required to comply with his rules and live up to his often arbitrary or undeclared standards. To ensure her compliance he undermines her work, self-respect, and even her sanity.

(c) Threats:

Informants' comments reveal that their husbands' threats to do them physical harm or abandon them were additional forms of psychological abuse they'd suffered.

Many women described an oppressive, violent atmosphere in their homes, in which they felt danger was just below the surface and could erupt at any moment. Some sensed danger in their husbands' "threatening moods" and demonstrations of anger. One woman was afraid because her husband violently disrupted the household by throwing and damaging household appliances and furniture.

Threats of bodily harm or murder were widely reported. For one woman, her burning the dinner prompted her husband to threaten to beat or kill her. An immigrant woman's husband said he would send her back to her homeland to have her killed. Another informant who'd had a gall bladder operation a month before reported her husband's threat to open the scar from the operation. For many women, the generally violent atmosphere in their marriage reinforced the likelihood of such threats. In one case, a man tortured his wife - "He likes to scare me by trying to strangle me" - and made it clear to her that it was within his power to kill her.

In several cases, a husband would threaten not only his wife but also her parents or her children. One woman told researchers that her husband said he would harm her parents and "suggested" she should kill herself or he would stab her. Another woman said her husband told her he would kill her and three of their children if she didn't go with him the the United States.

Three women reported that their husbands stated their intentions to commit suicide, and one of these men told his wife he planned to kill her first. Transition House workers pointed out that it is not uncommon for a husband to threaten self-destructive actions to coerce his wife into meeting his demands.

Some men, according to their wives' accounts, threatened to abandon their wives or force them to leave. One woman said:

> He wanted me to get out of town. He said he'd ask his friends to do something about that.

Women's economic dependence on their husbands made threats of abandonment a frightening possibility for some informants. In several cases, the husband's threat to leave his wife was coupled with a description of the difficult life she would have without him. An immigrant woman, who had worked very successfully in her husband's business, reported that he threatened her by saying he would go back to his native country and leave her in Canada "with nothing - to be a whore."

Their husband's threats of physical harm and/or abandonment were very real for women who had suffered actual physical assaults in the past and for those who lacked independent financial resources. Threats promoted fear which, in many cases, reinforced the women's sense of isolation and feelings of inadequacy. These latter were in part the products of their husbands' other forms of psychological abuse.

IV.C.4. Forced Sexual Activity:

Early in the research process, we decided to elicit comments from Transition House residents on forced sexual activity. Our researchers had found, in reviewing the preliminary data collected for this study and from our own and others' experience of working with battered women, that difficulties, including violence, in women's sexual relationships with their husbands was an aspect of wife battering that deserved attention. It is also an area about which little documentation exists - in part, we assumed, because women have traditionally been reluctant to discuss intimate sexual relations. A space was added, therefore, to the research file sheets for any comments residents chose to make about forced sexual activity they'd experienced.

Of the 104 residents who were asked, a number replied by simply saying yes (7) or no (27). For 34 women, no comment was recorded. Ten residents said they had not experienced forced sexual activity in their marriages but went on to describe problems related to sex, ranging from a lack of sexual activity to their husbands' physical rejection of them. Fifteen women said they'd been subjected by their husbands to violent or forced sexual relations and, of these, several said that they'd been raped.[*] In total, 43 women indicated their sexual relationship with their husbands was problematic.

A common difficulty informants described was their husbands' "excessive" demands for sex, with explicit or implicit threats of violence if their wives did not comply. One woman reported being threatened with a knife, and another said her husband threatened her life and then raped her. Several women remarked that they gave in to their husbands' demands to avoid conflict.

Many women indicated that they resented the fact that their feelings were not taken into account, that their husbands had not demonstrated affection for them, but still insisted on having sex. For example:

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[*] Of course, existing law maintains that a woman cannot be raped by her husband. The legal definition of rape under the Criminal Code of Canada is the act of forcible, fraudulent or otherwise coercive sexual intercourse committed by a male person upon a female person who is not his wife. See MacLeod, 1980, p.46.

> He expects lots of sex even though there is no communication between us otherwise. He has lots of other women so I feel he doesn't love me and I don't want to have sex with him.
>
> He'd insist on sex even after I had come home from work and had done all the housework and was tired.

One woman described being blackmailed into having sex with her husband on the basis that, if she loved him, she would do whatever he asked:

> He said I didn't love him if I wouldn't go to bed with him whenever he wanted.

For several women it was the violent atmosphere surrounding sexual activity that was a problem, noting that their husbands were angry or "very violent when sex is involved." One woman's account suggests that her husband expected her to experience the same feelings of sexual arousal [illegible] violence against her apparently prompted in him:

> He treats me like a kid - he beats me and then wants to cuddle and hug and make love right away.

Another woman said:

> He calls me a whore all the time and likes to pinch me so I'm black and blue all over my body.

Others said they were repulsed by the types of sexual acts their husbands preferred. One woman, whose husband had been arrested for indecent exposure shortly after they were married, described her troubled sexual relationship with him and her feelings about herself:

> I was never relaxed. I doubted myself because I never enjoyed it. I was disgusted by what he tried on me...He would pose and show himself to me. I felt like the public to him - just a viewer.

Men's right to have sex with their wives, without regard for the women's feelings, was made explicit in one woman's comments on forced sexual activity. She said she was told by her husband that she had to sleep with him when he wanted because their Christian religion maintained "The wife should submit to the husband."

For many of the women who said they had not experienced forced sexual activity, sexual relations were nevertheless a source of conflict. Several said they avoided sex with their husbands whenever they could. One woman said her husband's lack of affection sometimes "made me feel used." Another informant who tried to avoid having sex with her husband was told by him, " I could rape you, I'm your husband."

Several women felt rejected by their husbands who refused to make love to them or, as one woman said, "withdrew sexual favours as a torture."

In some cases, women reported that their husbands were not violent sexually but frequently complained about their wives' performance. One said her husband told their son that she was sexually inadequate. Others said their husbands berated them, calling them names because they didn't seem to enjoy sex. The implication seems to be that men are the sexual experts and set the standards for judging their wives' behaviour.

In summary, for many women, their sexual relationships with their husbands was yet another source of conflict. Once again, as with physical battering and psychological abuse, the woman is expected to comply with her husband's desires and authority. If she does not, she is berated, rejected and made to feel inadequate; and, in some cases, she faces threats or physical assault and rape.

So far we've discussed the circumstances of wife battering, focusing particularly on women's accounts of the physical assaults they'd sustained, psychological abuse, and their comments on problems with regard to their sexual relations with their husbands. In the following section we will present women's attempts to deal with the consequences of wife battering.

V. Dealing With the Consequences of Wife Assault

V.A. Women's Efforts to Improve Their Situations:

It is clear from the information Transition House residents provided to researchers that they tried in every way possible to stop their husbands' assaults. From their accounts, we discuss in this section how women tried to alter their own behaviour in an attempt to prevent or escape assault. In addition, we look at their efforts to get assistance from doctors, the helping professions, and from the police or legal services and the responses they encountered. Finally, we review how Vancouver Transition House is organized and functions to meet battered women's needs.

V.A.1. Altering Their Own Behaviour:

The comments of Transition House residents interviewed for this report indicate clearly that their major priorities were to stop their husbands' assaults of them and their children and thus make it possible to continue in their marriages.

For the most part, the efforts women made to improve their marriages seem to be based on the assumption that changing their own behaviour could alter their husbands' behaviour. Significantly their various efforts in this regard were uniformly unsuccessful. As we've seen in women's descriptions of assaults, their husbands' rules and standards for their wives' behaviour are rarely clear or consistent. This serves to undermine women's competence. In addition, their husbands' continued emphasis on women's incompetence and fault lead the women to believe that if they only change or improve, so will their situation. The isolation many battered women experience leaves them with few options other than relying on themselves. Therefore, while it is understandable that women try repeatedly to change, to comply with their husbands' demands and authority, it is not surprising that their attempts do not meet with success.

Many women said they tried to change themselves to avoid conflicts with their husbands by "not nagging" or by always agreeing with what their husbands said or did. As one woman said, "I used to just shut up, so as not to provoke him...that's what he wanted was for me to shut up."

Other women's accounts show their unsuccessful attempts to meet their husbands' requirements for effective household management. For example:

> I tried my best to do what he likes. I cleaned the house. I made the most money I could. I tried to keep everything very calm. But if he finds one thing wrong with the stove after I spend all day cleaning it, its all bad.

Some informants described anticipating their husbands' needs and desires, thereby hoping to preclude assaults:

> I used to comb his hair for him, set out his clean clothes for him, cook his favourite foods.
>
> I fed him very well and gave him a homelife and comforts. I used to think for him. I'd try to be one step ahead of him - packing his lunches, being useful and supportive.

Another woman said she tried to stay out of her husband's way. She also suggested that she was able to preserve her marriage for a time by counteracting her negative feelings about herself that had resulted from her husband's assaults:

> I realized I needed more and more encouragement. So I went to a 'Moms and Tots' program. We had good discussions there. I was appreciated and participated. It gave me a good self-image. It kept me going.

Although women's efforts to improve their marriages by altering their own behaviour were unsuccessful, their alternatives were limited. Data collected from the research file sheets show that 55 of the 148 Transition House residents did not identify anyone they could call on for help. Several of the 70 women who did identify friends or relatives they could ask for assistance, were inhibited from seeking such help because of the social stigma associated with wife battering. Others indicated they were afraid to jeopardize the safety of anyone they might contact for help and, therefore, did not want to involve friends or relatives.

Only 23 women identified the helping professions as a possible source of assistance. They felt constrained by the social disapproval they perceived directed against battered women and by the view that what happens in the home is a private matter. As one woman told researchers: "I couldn't tell all of what was going on to a stranger."

Furthermore, since many battered women are isolated by their husbands, they are left few options. The tragedy is that women's isolation and fears and their socially ascribed responsibility to preserve their marriages binds them to the risk of continued physical and psychological assaults.

V.A.2. Seeking Professional Help:

(a) The Medical Response:

Transition House residents who dealt with social service agencies, the medical profession, and the legal system found little to reassure them about getting assistance from these sources.

Although many battered women hesitate to call on police or social workers for help, they will see a doctor or go to a hospital when they are seriously injured. In analysing the data from the research file sheets, we find that 61.9% (52 out of 84) of the women who responded to questions* regarding medical treatment had received professional medical care.

Many of these women had received professional medical care at a hospital; others had been to a doctor for treatment. In several cases, women reported receiving medical treatment more than once - in fact, one indicated seven times in one year; others said eight times, ten times, or "often." One woman did not seek medical attention because she was afraid she would have to lay charges.

In our research data, there is little evidence that doctors or nurses who treated battered women for their physical injuries did more than bandage them and send them home. Only ten (or 6.9%) Transition House residents heard about Transition House from hospital staff or doctors. As MacLeod notes in Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle, most doctors take a "value-free" approach to cases of wife battering:

> Doctors are not required to report or question suspected cases of wife abuse. Medical training furthermore is generally concerned with individual pathology and individual cure. Although the recent approach to medicine labelled "holistic medicine" may change the orientation of the medical profession, currently most doctors do not attempt to treat an experience or a situation, they attempt to treat an individual's symptoms. (MacLeod, 1980,p.34-35)

Since medical professionals are often the first and only contact with "outsiders" a severely isolated battered woman will make, an important opportunity to help her is precluded by this narrow orientation.

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*See Appendix I , Research File Sheet for questions regarding medical treatment. Also, Introduction, p.6.

Twenty-three per cent (35 women) of our total research population were taking medication of some kind. Fifty-one per cent of these women were taking tranquilizers, muscle relaxants, sleeping pills, pain killers or other medicines prescribed to relieve such conditions as anxiety, tension, ulcers or gastro-intestinal disturbances.

As MacLeod also points out, medicine often dismisses wife battering by characterizing it as a psychiatric or emotional problem for the woman. Battered women may, understandably, exhibit symptoms of "depression" or "anxiety," as a consequence of the physical and psychological assaults they have suffered. Doctors, by focussing on individual symptoms, can justify prescribing tranquilizers or making psychiatric referrals as a response to these women. This practice, however, is a dangerous one: it blurs the causes of the woman's suffering and by invoking the medical mystique, it reduces her capacity to understand or respond to her situation. At the same time, the practice serves to obscure the problem of wife battering. Furthermore, once a woman is labelled as having a psychiatric problem, it may be even more difficult for her to get the help she needs to deal with the basic problem - her husband's assaults.

(b) The Response of the Helping Professions:

Since, as we have seen, many women are committed to maintaining their marriages, even after repeated assaults, it is not surprising that for most informants seeking help from professionals involved attempts to obtain marriage counselling to improve their situations. However, counselling did not work, either because their husbands refused to be involved or because the counsellors defined wife battering as the women's psychiatric problem.

Many women had suggested marriage counselling to their husbands but, in most cases, reported that the men had refused to go or rejected the idea after an initial effort. "He said he didn't have a problem," was a common reason given by these men for refusing to participate in a counselling process. One informant described trying to persuade her husband to go with her for counselling when the violence in their relationship began:

> But his response was 'If I can't help myself, no one else can.' In the end he said there was nothing

> wrong with him and it was all my fault...Even now he blames everyone but himself. His attitude was that he was never sorry he hit me, and he always said that when I deserved it I was going to get it.

Unfortunately this view is very often upheld by counsellors, psychologists, or psychiatrists, according to the accounts of women who were successful in obtaining marriage counselling with their husbands. One woman, whom we quoted earlier regarding her sexual relationship with her husband, sought psychiatric help to deal with her fears that her husband might sexually abuse their daughters - which, in fact, he subsequently did. Her husband had been arrested for indecent exposure shortly after she had married him. The psychiatrist she saw convinced her that _she_ was in the wrong; that her husband's sexuality was normal, since all kinds of sexuality are acceptable:

> And anyway, he said it was none of my business, I was narrow-minded and needed help too.

In addition, psychiatric advice seems often to be based on the premise that the woman is responsible if her husband assaults her. For example:

> The psychiatrist suggested we make a contract for my husband to help me with the kids. When it was his turn to help, I tried to wake him up and he hit me. I told the psychiatrist and he said, 'You don't wake up people like that, you don't insist, next time let him sleep. It's your fault.' There went the contract.

Holding the woman responsible for her husband's behaviour was a conspicuous feature of many mental health professionals' approach, even when the man had specifically been referred for treatment:

> My husband was referred to a psychiatrist by the police. I don't know who chose him. He treated _me_ for two months. Every time, I felt defeated. I asked if I could get my husband to come in next time but the psychiatrist said no, that _I_ needed more help.

A further problem with psychiatric advice is highlighted in the following account. A woman had been repeatedly physically and psychologically assaulted by her alcoholic husband of 34 years. She described the counsel she received from a psychiatrist she and her husband saw during a brief separation two years ago:

> The third visit I guess it was, the psychiatrist told me to go back. He said, 'If your husband takes one drink then pack your bags and leave and I'll come to court for you.' But he said to 'give it another try.' I told him I already had tried but he said, 'Give him another.' So we went back together.

This illustrates a common feature of psychiatric advice given to many of our informants. Psychiatrists frequently seem to perceive the man's violent behaviour (or alcoholism) as a sickness, for which the woman should accept the responsibility to rehabilitate him. This approach not only serves to absolve the man of responsibility for his own behaviour, but also ignores the risk to the woman's safety. As one Transition House worker commented, "The battering for many women continues in their interviews with professionals."

Although few Transition House residents described their experience in dealing with social workers, those who did comment rated individual social workers positively. One informant who had left her husband temporarily said the social worker she contacted was concerned for the woman's safety if she went back to her husband; she therefore urged her not to return home. On a subsequent occasion when this woman had again left home to escape her husband's violence, she describes the social worker as "excellent" in working with Transition House workers and RCMP officers to help the woman get custody of her child. Another informant detailed her very positive experience with social workers whose continued sensitivity and concern for the safety of the woman and her children over a period of several weeks, greatly relieved their fears. However, one resident described a most unfortunate encounter with the Ministry of Human Resources. After repeated beatings the woman had left her husband. When he found out where she was staying, he broke in to her apartment and forced her to go with him to the United States. She escaped and returned to Vancouver. Her financial assistance was cut off because she left the country without informing the Ministry:

> I was too embarrassed to tell my social worker that I had been kidnapped to the States. The worker ceremoniously ripped up my welfare card in front of me and told me I was subject to fraud charges.

In Wife Battering: An Analysis of the Ministry of Human Resources Policies and Strategies, the authors point out that the Ministry, which is the major employer of social workers in British Columbia, has no specific policy or procedures relating to battered women (Sanders-Krause and Hodgson, 1978, p.12-13). However, since most battered women approach the Ministry for income assistance, the policy and procedures regarding income assistance become crucial. These directives clearly require that social workers urge reconciliation and financial accountability, completely overlooking the effect of this on the physical safety of the women:

> Every effort should be made to contact the applicant's spouse prior to any assistance being granted, and to explore the possibilities of a reconciliation. Where reconciliation is not possible, the administering authority should attempt to have the applicant's spouse voluntarily maintain the applicant and any dependent children. (Ministry of Human Resources. Income Assistance Services Policy and Procedures Manual, July 1977, Vol.1, pp. 1-13)

Thus, individual social workers, who do recognize the potential dangers for a battered woman through reconciliation or further contact with her husband, must circumvent or disregard these directives in order to help her. Some who cannot afford to risk challenging the policy are effectively discouraged from providing needed assistance; and many others endeavour to follow the policy and procedures without ever recognizing the negative ramifications for their clients.

V.A.3. Seeking Protection and Legal Assistance:

Transition House residents' reports of police response to their requests for help differ little from that of doctors and the helping professions. Police too blame the woman in wife battering cases, urge reconciliation and disregard threats to her safety.

An informant, whose husband had just beaten her and threatened to kill her, described escaping with her baby and going directly to the police:

> The RCMP made me feel like it was all my fault. I wanted to press charges and to ask for a peace bond to keep him away from me. They said, 'How can you do this? It's Christmas, it's the baby's first Christmas and it's his child too,' things like that. Finally the RCMP officer just got mad at me because I wouldn't change my mind. He told me to go ahead and write down my story, but he would make a statement too about what he thought.

This kind of response by police cannot be explained or dismissed by simply blaming the individual officer involved. In a 1978 paper entitled "Battered Wives and the Justice System," the authors point out that:

> In general, legal officials view spousal assault as domestic dispute, disruptions of civil order rather than infractions of criminal law, with the result that few wife-batterers are charged or arrested. (Aldridge, et al., 1978, p.1)

Further, the Law Reform Commission of Canada recommended in 1976 that "Police departments encourage the screening out of family disputes from the criminal process." (MacLeod, 1980, p.61, emphasis added). Although the response of the RCMP officer in the account cited above cannot be excused, it does reflect an accepted interpretation of police policy.

Additional accounts from informants interviewed for this report reveal that a wife's attempts to charge her husband for assaulting her are more likely to be effective if an unrelated charge against him can also be mustered. For example, one informant reported that she had charged her husband with assaulting her after he had split open her head. The police picked him up and "Because he had over due [traffic] fines that he couldn't pay, they were able to keep him for a month." Another woman described a series of events in which she repeatedly tried to escape from her husband by moving into a new apartment or by staying with friends or relatives; her husband consistently found her and abducted her. On one occasion, however, he tried to abduct her from a public place - a restaurant - and he was charged with common assault and public mischief.

A further problem identified by informants was police reluctance to intervene at all in a domestic assault situation. One woman's comments illustrate this abdication of responsibility. She described being beaten by her husband, a lawyer in the small island community where they were living:

> I called the RCMP but they said because there were no more boats leaving the island that night that they wouldn't do anything. I went and stayed with a friend.

Her husband convinced her to withdraw the assault charge that she eventually laid. He persuaded her that if she persisted with the charge, she would be more embarrassed and humiliated than he. He also called the chief of police and apologized for her behaviour. This man's professional relationship with law enforcement officials may account, in part, for their reluctance to help the woman. Nonetheless, indications of widespread police reluctance to intervene have led to recommendations for changes in police practice. The Report of the Task Force on Family Violence by the United Way of the Lower Mainland, Vancouver, recommended:

> That police send help whenever a woman calls and says her husband has assaulted or threatened her, arrest the husband in all cases where a court order has been violated and assist victims of wife-battering in other ways such as obtaining medical help. (MacLeod, ed., 1979, p.10)

It has been noted in research on the relationship between social service agencies and police (Levens, Monograph III, 1977, p.35), that the police usually do not make referrals to social service agencies, and that the agencies tend to avoid police referrals. Still, several informants told our researchers that the police, in fact, helped them by referring them to social workers, Transition House or other community agencies. (In Vancouver, the Police Department and the Ministry of Human Resources have developed a close working relationship. A program, entitled "Car 86," was established in 1977 through which a social worker and a Police Constable team respond to "after hours" child abuse and domestic crisis complaints.)

Clearly, in addition to referrals to social service agencies, an arrest policy (see recommendations of The Report of the Task Force on Family Violence, p.10), requiring that police arrest a man who had beaten his wife in order to remove him from the situation, would have been helpful in many cases our informants described. An arrest policy would not only preclude further harm in a situation, but it would also challenge the view widely held by batterers, as we've noted earlier, that wife battering is appropriate behaviour. Instead, the current police response reinforces the husband's view that his behaviour is acceptable and indicates that wife battering is not a crime. Further, it leaves the woman in danger.

One informant's account of her husband's improved behaviour, after he had been charged and incarcerated, illustrates the potential benefits that could result from an arrest policy, and punishment of batterers:

> He didn't touch me again for a year and a half, even though he was drinking still. He went back to his old job and kind of smartened up. Naturally he blamed me a lot - how could I have done it to him, how could I have put him in jail. But he always blamed me for everything that happened so I was used to it. At least he didn't beat me for a year and a half.

A revised policy for law enforcement agencies is, however, only one of the changes suggested by informants' accounts of their efforts to escape battering. Changes are also needed in family court policy and procedures to underline that wife battering is not acceptable behaviour and to ensure some protection for the women involved.

The following account illustrates a common problem faced by battered women in dealing with some family court counsellors. Wife battering is treated as a private family matter and the woman is discouraged then from seeking protection against her husband's violence:

> I spoke to a counsellor because I wanted to charge my husband with beating me. She told me that if I did, it would only get worse and she said that, 'Assault charges are a criminal charge. That is okay against other people that you don't know but not against your family.' So I have decided not to do it.

Transition House workers indicated in interviews with researchers that when they accompanied residents to meetings with family court counsellors, similar views were expressed in some cases. However, workers reported that, in other cases, counsellors provided sensitive and realistic advice. Once again, it is important to note that the attitudes of individual workers in the court system are only part of the problem. The laws and policies that govern family court practice are based on maintaining the family as a private institution and discouraging intervention that might undermine the family unit - even in cases where the woman involved is in danger of physical harm. As the authors of "Battered Wives and the Justice System" note:

> When spousal assault charges are referred to Family Court instead of Criminal Court, they tend to be treated less seriously. In Criminal Court the matter would be handled strictly as criminal assault. In Family Court, however, the matter is treated as a civil problem, an aspect of family dysfunction; the court is oriented toward the mediation of problems between husbands and wives (keeping them together)... (Aldridge,et al.,1978, p.1)

Furthermore, a Catch-22 situation is created by police and family court policies and practices that discourage women from laying assault charges against the men who beat them. Many family court counsellors, although it is not part of their mandate, endeavour in meetings with complainants to ascertain whether they actually intend to carry through with the charges. This questioning, however, may amount to such severe scrutiny that women justifiably feel they are being persuaded to drop the charges. If they do, then that is seen, of course, as corroboration of the workers' assumptions. As we've noted above, police officers' responses to women also serve to discourage them from laying charges. Admittedly, several women told our researchers that they had in the past laid charges and subsequently dropped them. Some had indeed changed their minds. But an equal number decided not to proceed because of their fear of husbands' reprisals or their doubts that they would be protected - i.e. that it would do any good. According to participants in a national consultation on wife battering (MacLeod, March 1980,pp.31-33) women's fears and doubts are well-founded. Lack of protection is a major problem faced by battered women; it is a major short-coming of law enforcement and legal services in Canada.

V.A.4. Trying to Escape From Assault:

A common question posed by those who consider the plight of battered women is : "Why do they stay?" The data collected in this research suggest that women do, in fact, try to escape from battering.

According to information provided on the Research File Sheets, 101 (or 75%) of the total of 134 Transition House residents who responded to the question "Have you ever left before?," said yes.

Of the residents (41 in total) who specified where they had gone when they left before, more than half (23) said they sought refuge with friends or relatives. Eight indicated they went directly to a Transition House or emergency shelter; three went to Powell Place* or Owl House*; four went initially to a hotel or motel; and three said they left the city where they had been living. Altogether, 34 women said they had tried to come to Vancouver Transition House before, but no space was available.

Many of the 33 women who had not left before had tried to get assistance from the helping professions or the police and legal system. In the absence of any assistance to make their marital situations more tolerable, they were trapped in a violent environment; they tried to follow the advice they'd received to "give it another chance" or to improve themselves, because "it's their own fault." For some of these women, their husbands' threats of even more severe assaults effectively deterred them from trying to escape. As one woman said, "I had to reason with myself because I knew that if I left I could never go back...because it would be ten times worse."

Residents we interviewed spoke about the circumstances of their attempts to leave their husbands (ten of the 21 women interviewed had left before). In some cases women described leaving with the hope that "He would change" and then they subsequently returned home to try again. Others fled to escape an assault and were persuaded by police officers, counsellors or psychiatrists to give their husbands another chance. In some cases, the woman, in her haste, had not been able to take her children with her; she returned home rather than risk losing custody or because she feared for the children's safety if they stayed with her husband. And in several instances, women described leaving their husbands, setting up new residences only to be pursued by their husbands who moved in and refused to leave. One woman reported that her husband found her repeatedly and beat her so badly that she was in hospital seven times; she tried staying at a downtown Vancouver hotel or with relatives and, on another occasion, she fled to Prince George, B.C., all to no avail - he found her each time and beat her severely.

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* See Appendix VI for a list of services.

"The options open to the battered wife under both federal and provincial laws do not protect her," according to Linda MacLeod, author of Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle. MacLeod analyses these laws and the effectiveness of options, such as peace bonds, injunctions, and ex parte interim orders. She concludes that "accepted legal procedures and exceptions written into the law to protect the unity of the family make convictions virtually impossible" and reinforce women's isolation, dependence and powerlessness.(See Chapter 6 of Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle for an analysis of Wife Battering and the Law). Thus, for many battered women, even if they leave their husbands, they cannot escape further assaults.

In summary, women's descriptions of their attempts to stop their husbands' assaults show clearly how limited their options are. These accounts also demonstrate how effectively existing laws and social policies and practices uphold men's right to control their wives - even if violence is the instrument of control.

Women do not like to be assaulted. They try in whatever ways are possible to stop the assaults. Women who assume responsibility for improving their marriages and try to change their own behaviour find that the assaults continue. Those who reach out to marriage counsellors or mental health professionals in most cases are blamed by the professionals, and persuaded, even at risk to the women's lives, to give their husbands another chance. In some cases, they are undermined by their husbands' refusal to seek help. For many women who have been systematically and effectively isolated by their husbands, seeking outside help - whatever its limitations - is not a viable option.

If the assaults our informants described had been committed against someone outside the family unit, it would surely result in immediate arrest and charges under the Criminal Code of Canada. However, when husbands assault their wives, policies of non-intervention, upholding the privacy of the family, leave at risk the women who seek protection.

If a woman is fortunate enough to find a sympathetic social worker, sensitive to her problems and willing to circumvent or disregard Ministry of Human Resources procedures, she may get some help. The doctor she sees for medical attention, however, will mend her broken bones, stitch up her wounds, and ask no questions for fear of interfering in a private family matter. If she overcomes her fear of her husband's threats and tries to escape, she again faces obstacles in getting the assistance she needs from the "helping professions," saddled with policies that deny the reality of her situation. Ironically, social welfare policy, urging family reconciliation as an economical alternative to having women and children dependent on welfare defeats its intended purpose. Reinforcing families within which there is wife battering, serves to increase the family's dependence on social service institutions to hold the family together. Furthermore, for a battered woman, the family is not a haven from an alienating public world nor the basis of social relations that society has commonly considered it to be. It is an arena of violence.

If a woman leaves her family, she is not safe. She has no protection against her husband's pursuit and violent revenge for leaving - her ultimate challenge to his authority. One informant's statement of despair reflects many other women's feelings after trying everything they can think of to get help: "It's really a shame. I sure wish there was something that could help."

Of all the resources women utilized to deal with their situations, Transition House was the only resource on which they consistently commented positively.

V.B. Transition House as a Response:

V.B.1. Background/History of Vancouver Transition House:

A current staff member, one of the original group of women who provided the impetus for the establishment of Vancouver Transition House noted that it "developed directly from concern for women as expressed by the Women's Movement in Vancouver in the early seventies." (See Appendix IV for this worker's detailed accounting of the history and operation of Vancouver Transition House.) This concern led initially to the founding, in early 1972, of a drop-in centre for women known as "A Women's Place" - run entirely by volunteers. It quickly became apparent to those involved with that project that the drop-in facilities were entirely inadequate for women in crisis situations. There was a pressing need for a fully-staffed shelter where women could go with their children to escape from "intolerable marital situations," and receive much-needed emotional and physical support. In mid-1972, concerned women from "A Women's Place" and Vancouver Status of Women began to seek funds for the establishment of such a facility; they secured letters of support from various "helping" organizations in Vancouver attesting to the need for this kind of a service. Over a year later, a house and funds were made available by the provincial government through the Children's Aid Society. In late 1973, Vancouver Transition House was able to begin operation:

> We set out to have a warm, caring safe environment, with sympathetic staff who had practical knowledge of the court system, of parenting, of the social assistance system...anything we could do to assist her in seeing herself as a capable, worthwhile person was essential. We strove to show by our example that women are capable of doing everything.
> (MacDermot, Appendix IV)

In 1974 the house was placed under the jurisdiction of the Vancouver Resources Board which was set up by the provincial government to oversee social services. Then, in January of 1978, after the Vancouver Resources Board was disbanded, Vancouver Transition House formally joined the provincial Ministry of Human Resources as a permanently funded resource and workers, as a result, became Human Resources staff.

V.B.2. Operation and Staff Functions/Roles:

The house itself is a small, two-storey dwelling which can accommodate six to eight women and ten to twelve children at a time. Workers noted that with this number of people a place "three times the size" is needed. Women with children can stay up to a month, with extensions granted in special cases; women without children stay only until they can arrange for alternate shelter.

The house is operated by twelve full-time staff members, including one child-care worker, and a supervisor, as well as ten on-call staff who fill in for the regular workers when necessary. There are three shifts per day with two staff members working the day shift from 8:30 to 4:30, two staff on afternoons from 4:30 to 12:30, and one worker on the graveyard shift from 12:30 to 8:30. Staff work rotating shifts of three days on and three days off.

The different shifts are characterized by different moods and different functions. But there are certain duties common to all shifts, including record keeping, update on residents, handling crisis calls and information calls,referrals and intake. Intake of new residents can happen at any time; the decision is made by the staff on duty, according to available space.

In general, workers described the day shifts during the week as being the busiest times because of the task-oriented nature of the work. This is the time when residents have to deal with what workers termed the "practical" things which must be accomplished during their stay at Transition House - appointments and arrangements with community services and resources, including courts, lawyers, social workers, financial aid workers and doctors. The staff ensure that the residents are able to get to their appointments and if necessary, accompany them to provide support and/or act as an advocate. Workers stressed that they are not trying to provide a service on which the women are dependent but one which reinforces the residents' own abilities to take care of themselves.

In addition to assisting the residents in dealing with their outside arrangements, day shifts include a lot of duties associated with the house management and maintenance, including shopping, dinner arrangements, office work, laundry, cleaning, banking, answering the phone, et cetera. Workers commented on this dual nature of their jobs - the work of running a home and that of dealing with the outside community resources and services - and the importance to the residents of seeing that housework is regarded as valuable work. As one worker stated:

> A woman who comes to Transition House realizes a woman who runs a house does all those things that we do. What I do at Transition House is an extension of a woman's usual job, but I'm getting paid for it, recognized.

Several workers mentioned that it was essential not to lose sight of the needs of the residents in the midst of all the activity of the day shift. As one staff member noted:

> It's a time when if a woman doesn't have specific things to do, the depression can surface - because everyone else is busy. It's also a time when she can get lost in the shuffle. On a busy day shift I have to concentrate on the needs of the women...I have to try and be particularly sensitive...it's easy to miss the woman sitting in the kitchen.

The afternoon shift was described by the staff members as being quieter and more relaxed than the day shift - a time when they are able to talk with and get to know the residents. One worker explained the importance of this interaction in the following way:

> A lot of women have been isolated, restricted - have to be home at a certain time, etc. So it's a new experience for her to be able to just sit and talk - for five hours if necessary.

Although counselling is part of their job, workers continually stressed that their role in working with the residents was one of "equal and advocate" not as a "professional or rescuer." They were very careful to state that they do not practice therapy, noting that it would be both "dangerous" and "irresponsible" to do so - "especially as the woman is not at Transition House long...it can open a can of worms."

During the afternoon shift there is also an opportunity to help women solidify their plans, to encourage them, help with apartment hunting, to talk with the women who work during the day, and with those who can't live at Transition House due to space restrictions.

Several of the workers emphasized the importance of the social interaction which occurs in the evening, and the support which the women give each other at that time. It's a time when, as one worker stated, the "anger, pain and fears come out" and the residents really have an opportunity to talk.

Graveyard shifts entail phone calls (mostly from emergency services), occasional admissions in the middle of the night, tasks such as laundry and clean-up, assisting women with sick children, and spending time with women who are having difficulty sleeping because of all they've been through.

Weekends are somewhat quieter than the rest of the week and as one worker said, "Weekends are a hard time for the woman because it's sort of family time." The staff make a particular effort to talk with the residents and try and take them out somewhere.

Staff workers were asked in the interviews to comment on what skills or qualities they believed were necessary for their jobs. Among the numerous qualities that were identified as essential, several were mentioned repeatedly, including a non-judgemental attitude, the ability to empathize with the residents, and a variety of backgrounds and life experience.

The necessity of remaining non-judgemental when dealing with the residents is considered crucial by staff members for several reasons. The major reason, as expressed by the following worker's comment, is to ensure that the residents are free to make their own choices:

> A worker should be able to take stock of her own judgements regarding what a woman should do, how she should be with her kids, what she should not do - suspend them, be aware of them. All they are are judgements. In working with the women the emphasis should lie with choices. The worker should be able to draw together a list of choices without judgemental overlays.

Staff members believe it is particularly important to maintain a non-judgemental attitude when working with women who are at the point of returning to their husbands. As one worker remarked, "It is sometimes hard to be non-judgemental in these situations, but necessary in order not to cut off trust of the woman for staff and put the woman on the defensive." Workers stressed that they want the women to feel that they can return to Transition House if necessary.

Empathy and understanding, stemming from their own life experience, were among the qualities most frequently identified as necessary for Transition House work as the following quotes from workers indicate:

> Number one for me is a lot of listening because that's where I was starving. An understanding ear - it's the most important thing. I feel very certain that a number of women who come there, they've never been able to share their feelings before.

> The feeling of sameness with the residents is probably the most valuable thing that happens there; not being in isolation.

The staff's experience of the benefits to residents of the supportive atmosphere of Transition House is in direct contradiction to the statements of a former Minister of Human Resources, Bill Vander Zalm, who said, when commenting on Transition House:

> ...the atmosphere is not too good. You have a problem, you are constantly reminded of it, and other people come in with a similar problem. Number one is to get her back in the home, and provide counselling...To leave her in Transition House where she builds up a dependency on meeting with people in similar circumstances, I don't think that resolves anything. (Schendlinger,1978, p.38)

Transition House residents also commented at length on the beneficial atmosphere of the House (See page 106).

Many of the staff stressed the need for variety within the staff complement, with a broad range of backgrounds and life experiences represented:

> Women express different sides to different people. They try to express the side they think will be accepted so with different workers, different things come out.

In conjunction with this, workers also mentioned that there should be a wide age-range and variety of ethnic backgrounds represented on staff.

Among other qualities which staff members regarded as necessary were: a sense of humor, in order to "help keep things in perspective";

energy; patience; dedication; organizational ability; ability to work under pressure; knowledge of kids and parenting problems; and a knowledge of community resources.

The stresses of working at Transition House are great and they exact a toll on the staff, as evidenced by the comments of the workers on the degree of "burnout" experienced. Staff members referred to the "emotional exhaustion" they felt after working at Transition House and one worker remarked that it was difficult "finding different ways of coping with the pain I see every day. It is hard to go home and turn it off."

The workers reported the single greatest stress of their jobs was the sense of helplessness and frustration they experienced when a resident left the House and returned home to a particularly bad situation. Many referred to the depression they experienced in not being able to help these women more - not having the time or resources necessary.

Shift-work was also mentioned as being a great stress, with staff commenting both on the adverse effects on the workers - "It's hard physically. I feel like I'm often in a state of jet lag," and on the residents - "It's not good for a woman to have to deal with ten workers to get her problem resolved."

Other stresses workers referred to included the frustration experienced due to the slowness of working with bureaucracy; the depression felt because of the "band-aid" orientation of crisis work; and the difficulty of dealing with residents' husbands.

In spite of the stressful nature of their jobs, the workers emphasized the positive and rewarding aspects of the work. Helping the residents to become independent emerged from the interviews as being the greatest reward:

> It's rewarding seeing somebody get themselves together, get the self-esteem...to go out on her own. And even if they go back, they've learned that it's not just them. Maybe they won't take it next time. It's rewarding to see someone the first night they come in and five days later to see how they've changed - gained confidence, relaxed.
>
> There's an opportunity to tell women that there's another way to live - not beaten, victimized. You deserve more.

Workers mentioned that even if a woman returns home, she is better equipped to get out if necessary in the future.

In summary, in the descriptions workers gave of their roles at Transition House the emphasis was on the support which they are able to give the residents - both in terms of practical advice and advocacy, as well as understanding and empathy. Although the work is stressful, mainly due to the limited resources available to help the residents, the staff members stressed the rewarding nature of their work - the opportunity to help women become independent.

V.B.3. How Women Use Transition House:

Many women came to Transition House in crisis: They had been beaten by their husbands and sought refuge. Many other women left home because they feared a physical assault was imminent. Several informants described their husbands' threats or the build-up of tension they had come to recognize as a precursor of violence and they left before it could happen again. Some women came to Transition House for shelter - unable to remain in their previous accommodation because their husbands had forced them to leave or had caused them to flee from another city to Vancouver where they could not find housing.

During the eight month period of this research project 148 women and 163 children came to Transition House. One hundred and one of the children were five years of age or under. The following statistics (from Sleeth, 1979, pp. 51-69 and Transition House records) from previous years show that the numbers for the research period are slightly lower than average. This may be due in part to the local housing crisis, which means women would have to stay longer at Transition House because they cannot find housing.

ACCOMMODATED:

	Women	Children	Total
1975	344	411	755
1976	340	341	681
1977	331	395	726
1978	318	365	683

REFUSED AND REFERRED DUE TO LACK OF SPACE:

	Women	Children	Total
1975	379	454	833
1976	329	445	774
1977	350	428	778
1978	370	480	850

As these figures indicate, lack of space regularly forces Vancouver Transition House to turn away more women and children that it can accommodate. During the eight month research period 145 women without children, and 300 mothers with a total of 425 children were forced to seek alternate shelter (these approximate figures were taken from Transition House records).

Vancouver Transition House is a Ministry of Human Resources programme under the administration of Lower Mainland Special Services. Although the majority of women who come to Vancouver Transition House are residents of Vancouver, the House is also used by women from various areas of the lower mainland, women from other localities in B.C., and also women from out of the Province. Of the 148 women who were residents at Transition House during the research period, 89 of these women (60.95%) were residents within the City of Vancouver and a further 27 women (18.49%) resided within the Lower Mainland exclusive of Vancouver. This then represents a total of 116 women (79.44%) who were from Lower Mainland homes. Of the remaining number, 16 (10.95%) were from elsewhere in British Columbia, seven (4.79%) were from out of province and in the case of seven women their previous residence was not recorded.

How did women know about Transition House? Exactly half of the 144 women for whom a response was recorded, indicated that they had been referred through emergency or crisis services or by a social worker with whom they'd been in contact. The next largest category was friends.

The sources of information and the number of times each was mentioned are listed below. In a few instances, a woman mentioned more than one source. We have counted the one mentioned first. Some women who had been to Transition House before indicated their original source of information and this is tallied in the appropriate category. Those who did not state their original source are listed only as "here before."

Emergency Services	29
Social Workers	26
Crisis Lines/Centres	17
Friend	13
(in one case, the friend was a Transition House worker)	
Media	5
Pamphlet	1
Here Before	7
Doctor	5

Hospital	4
Pine Free Clinic	1
School Nurse	1
Family Court	5
Police	4
Legal Aid/Law Student	2
Neighbour	3
Another Transition House	3
Family Place	1
Owl House	1
Powell Place	1
YWCA	2
Counsellor (unspecified) referral	1
UIC counsellor	1
Financial Worker	1
WIN House	1
Aurora House	1
Mental Health Association	1
Vancouver Status of Women	1
Al Anon	1
Relative	1
Aware of Resources	1
Phone Book	1
Salvation Army	1
Word of mouth	1

(No record......4)

The length of stay at Transition House ranged from one day (counting as one day two periods of several hours and one overnight stay) to an exceptional 83 days. Sixty-three (42%) stayed three days or less; 87 (58%) stayed a week or less; and 28 (18%) stayed one day. The following chart is a breakdown of the number of women in relation to their length of stay at Transition House:

Number of days at Transition House	Number of Women
1	28
2	17
3	18
4	5
5	9
6	6
7	4
8	3
9	8
10	1
11	5
12	3
13	3
14	3
15	5
16	3
17	2
18	1
19	1
20	3
21	2
25	2
26	2
28	2
30	2
32	1
33	2
35	1
37	2
39	1
42	1
55	1
83	1

While women stayed at Transition House they made use of two main categories of resources: one,legal resources, including police, family court counsellors, private lawyers, legal aid, and so on; and two, crisis/support services such as social workers, financial assistance workers, unemployment insurance commission services, counselling or training, and health services. Seventy-three of the 148 women, used crisis/support services, and 52 women used legal resources of some kind. Thirty-six women used both kinds of services. Sixty per cent (or 89) of Transition House residents utilized one or more of the above range of resources during their stay. In a few cases, a resident had already engaged a private lawyer or had been in touch with a social worker prior to coming to Transition House.

From residents' comments on Transition House (in the interviews conducted for this research), it is clear that women used their time at the House to deal with the practical necessities of their situation. In addition, residents indicated they found Transition House to be helpful in their developing a sense of perspective and in regaining self-respect.

Their comments indicate that safety was a particularly important feature in their positive experience of Transition House. They felt protected from the violence they'd suffered by being in a location unknown to their husbands, with locks on the doors and other people around in case they needed help. One woman said, "It feels like a weight has been taken off my shoulders." Another said, "Even with the restraining order I wouldn't have felt safe in my own apartment." Several referred to not being "so scared all the time," feeling calm and having a "feeling of security," and, therefore, being able to "think clearly."

In addition, most women talked about the benefits of talking with other women who had also been assaulted. They realized they were "not alone," a frequent comment, and that other likeable and competent women had had bad experiences very similar to their own:

> It was good to listen and to talk with other women in the same boat and to know we could congregate under the same roof. We were all hurting but there was a lot of laughter because it's really just all the same.

Many indicated they were able to develop a perspective on their own lives - to think about the future and reflect on the past - because they were safe, and able to talk about their experience with other women who understood. One woman, who had been a resident for only three days, said, "I reallyneeded those three days at Transition House. I let myself feel sorry for myself and really faced up to how bad things had really been." Other women spoke not only of the perspective but also the confidence they had gained through talking with the workers and the other residents. For example:

> It wasn't through counselling with the workers really. But Transition House just opened my eyes to the realities everywhere. It let me see a lot of women worse off than I was. You lose that sense of hopelessness.
>
> I started to feel that there is a way and you're not alone.

Since, as we've seen, isolation is a predominant feature of the psychological abuse they've been subjected to, making connections with other women was especially useful and contributed to many women's development of perspective and self-respect.

Confidence in the workers' ability to help them with practical matters, by going to family court with them or giving advice on housing or financial matters, contributed to residents' sense of security. The workers' support made difficult tasks manageable for many residents. In addition, the non-judgemental nature of the workers' assistance served to increase women's self-respect. As one woman said:

> The staff don't make you feel 'I know all that.' They don't hide things about their own problems and that makes me feel O.K.

Another resident said she benefitted from the workers' positive feedback, especially regarding her parenting skills which had been derogated by her husband:

> They made me feel more confident as a mother. I felt I was doing a pretty good job but before I just got shit.

Many women commented positively on the staff's approach, specifying that the workers are friendly and "always have time to talk to you" and "workers are always cheering people up, making me feel that I'm alright - a good, nice person."

Other women stressed the benefits of the workers' understanding and encouragement of the residents' right to make their own choices.

> They helped me without being down on my husband, which helped me to leave him because I didn't have to come to his defense.
>
> Transition House workers were all great. I was there once before and they took me back again. They helped me when I needed it.

Although it is clear the Transition House experience is beneficial for most residents and, in fact, a turning point for many, it cannot and should not be expected to solve all the problems battered women face. As we've seen in the preceding discussion of how residents utilize Transition House, many women do gain a much-needed perspective on their situations and increased self-respect. However, their reports to researchers about their needs and fears, their feelings (now, that is) after being at Transition House for a time, and their hopes and plans for the future reveal many issues that require attention, including protection, employment, housing, and ongoing support services.

Protection is the most crucial need women identified. Several women said they were afraid their husbands would find them:

> I'm afraid of him coming around and finding me somehow. He's been phoning my parents and saying that he'll kill to get the baby.
>
> Myself, I feel I can make it really good on my own but right now I feel so insecure. I still see a lot of negatives around me - I have nightmares, I don't want to be alone in the house.

Unfortunately, their fears are well-founded. As noted earlier (Section V.A.3.) and according to Transition House workers in Vancouver and across Canada (MacLeod, report on wife battering consultation, March 1980, p.9) lack of protection is a major problem for battered women. They are not safe. Workers pointed out, in interviews with researchers, that restraining orders/court orders often aren't effective; family court often allows the husband to have visitation rights or awards the husband joint custody of the children which ultimately gives him access to his wife; and in many cases, a husband convicted of assaulting his wife is given a suspended sentence. As Gault points out in "Wife Battery":

> Even if the wife should prosecute, the family court is very reluctant to give jail time to a wife batterer. Usually batterers get a reprimand, but if the situation is extreme, they may get probation with the proviso of 'good behaviour'. If the probation order is broken (usually repeatedly), the batterer can get up to 18 months for a breach of probation. In common assault (i.e. on anyone but wife and children) the offender is liable for much more time and so many repeated assaults against a stranger would not be ignored by the court. Even if the batterer was sentenced, if he had been supporting the family, then the wife and children are placed in financial straits. Thus, if one were to assault someone, the best bet would be to assault ones' wife because society is least concerned with this type of assault.
> (Gault, 1978, p.8)

One Transition House worker concluded that the only way a woman can be safe is by moving to a different city and changing her name.

Finding work and housing were primary aims for many Transition House residents', in fact, these are mandatory pre-requisites for women who want to establish their independence from their husbands. Several women were enrolled, or planned to enroll, in upgrading courses or training programs in order to increase their labour force potential. These programs, however, tend to focus on preparing women for lower-paying jobs as homemakers or restaurant workers. Many women were successful in finding accommodation for themselves and their children, in spite of the zero vacancy rate in housing in Vancouver. In addition, Munroe House*, a second stage housing residence in Vancouver, places a priority on service to ex-Transition House residents. The Red Door* housing service and the YWCA housing registry* are useful resources for ex-residents according to Transition House workers. Nevertheless, housing remains a serious problem, and several Transition House workers identified it as a reason why some women have to return to their husbands.

Furthermore, some workers felt that the income assistance benefits available to women for basic support and shelter under Social Assistance (the Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act) are too low. For example, for a woman with two children the shelter allowance is $325.00 per month. Since it is almost impossible to find a two or three bedroom apartment in Vancouver for that rent, the woman would have to spend a portion of her basic support allowance of $287.00 a month to pay for accommodation, leaving very little money for food, clothing, and transportation. A report by the National Council of Welfare, entitled Women and Poverty, shows that welfare payments, and other benefits combined, are well below the poverty line in all provinces in Canada. The report contends that if a woman's only sources of income are a former husband or the government, she will almost certainly be destitute. The authors urge governments to increase welfare rates. (See National Council of Welfare, Women and Poverty, 1979, for an analysis of the poverty facing the majority of Canadian women and recommendations to improve the situation.)

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*See Appendix VI for a list of agencies and services.

The need for ongoing support was deemed as essential by a majority of residents. Some women, who returned home to their husbands to "try again" on different terms, said they wanted and needed to be involved in a support group for battered women. At the same time, one woman said if her husband ever knew she'd joined a support group, "It would cause a lot of trouble."

Most residents spoke of needing various types of support. One informant said she would need accompaniment when she went to court, baby-sitting, and transportation, at least until she gets legal matters settled. Several others said they, too, needed support in the form of information and advice.

Fear of living alone, to endure not only economic disadvantages but loneliness and isolation, was reported by many women. Several were worried about future relationships they might have. One informant said she feared loneliness would lead her to enter into another relationship too quickly, where she would be "silent, playing the game." Another woman shared these fears, noting that she had never been single for more than a week since she began having boyfriends at age 12 or 13. She went on to describe her hope to avoid the dependency she'd always developed with men: "I hope to find someone who won't interfere with my life, but will take the pressure off my need to have a man in my life."

Many women said that as a result of their experiences with their husbands, they were distrustful of men. They needed the support of women friends to overcome the loneliness they anticipated as single mothers. For those women who had been isolated by their husbands, learning how to develop social contacts and to make friends is a priority.

Until 1980, support groups specifically for battered women were virtually non-existent. Then Vancouver Transition House workers began a follow-up program for ex-residents. It is directed as much as possible by the ex-residents themselves and includes social activities as well as advocacy, liaison with and referral to community resources.

In addition, Battered Women's Support Services was founded with the aim of developing a range of support services for battered women themselves and educational programs for professionals who work with them. In August 1980, they offered a training workshop in Vancouver for women interested in leading support groups.

In addition to needing support to deal with the problems of loneliness and beginning a new life on their own, several informants also voiced concern about being effective parents alone. As one woman said:

> I wonder how great a mother I will be alone... Will I be able to handle him when he's older? Will we be able to talk? Will I be enough for him - have enough time for him?

Others were anxious to get help in order to be good parents, for example:

> I want to learn about the baby - what do you do when she cries and gets on your nerves? How do you keep her occupied?

During their stay at Transition House, several residents began to address these concerns by taking parenting courses, such as "parenting alone" or Project Parent.*

It is important to remember, however, that many women's confidence in their ability to care for their children had been systematically undermined by their husbands. In many cases, it is not parenting skills but support to rebuild their confidence that they require. Furthermore, as a single parent on a restricted income, there are practical difficulties in managing a household and caring for children. Many women's major fear for their children is financial: "I worry about things like money for schooling or whatever he needs."

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*See Appendix VI for a list of agencies and services.

One informant went home to her husband because, though she was worried about her own and her daughter's safety, "What else is there to do? It's a way to give her things in life, clothing, some pleasures." The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women reports that the average wage paid to a woman is only 60% of the average wage paid to a man and, thus, it is true that children will have a lower standard of living if their mother is their sole support (MacLeod, 1980,p.33). If the woman is able to find paid employment her time for her children and for housework will be limited. One woman who was interviewed after she had left Transition House and had moved to her own apartment said her inability to meet household expenses was upsetting. Programs are needed that treat such anger as a legitimate response to the social problems women face. Women's anger or frustration should not be sedated or regarded as a sign of personality disorder or a need for therapy.

Women's fears about money and being able to provide for their children's basic needs were often in tandem with fears about their children's emotional development. Would they be affected by the violence against their mothers they'd witnessed? The following quotation is representative of several women's concerns:

> I worry about my son hurting his wife, but he says 'the day I hit a woman I'm not a man,' so I feel better. I hope my girls don't end up with men like I've had. I wouldn't want them to go through that.

The child care worker at Transition House, in a 1980 speech given to a Vancouver Management Conference of Family Court Workers at Parksville, B.C. outlines some of the problems children of battered women experience. (See Appendix V for a complete text of the speech by Sue Sopp-Gilson). She describes the violence and aggression many children, especially boys,demonstrate against their mothers and other children. Many other children are withdrawn and submissive, "trying very hard not to be noticed." Some are far behind developmentally in speech, physical co-ordination, and social skills within their own peer groups and with adults. Some want food constantly and are overweight even at a very early age; others are "failure to thrive" children - for example, one ten month old baby who is the size of a baby three months old.

Sopp-Gilson concludes that special services are needed for children who have problems as a result of living through years of seeing their mothers beaten and abused. And she discusses the support many women need to develop effective methods of discipline and to counteract their husbands' devaluation of the women's parenting skills.

It is clear from this review of Transition House residents' needs, fears, and concerns for the future, that they face real problems whether they return home to their husbands or set out to make a new life for themselves and their children. Their concerns are well-founded and often shared by women in our society generally. They lack protection, adequate housing, decently-paid employment, and ongoing support services. Their stay at Transition House is the first time many battered women have had an opportunity to assess their situations in a supportive environment and make decisions about the future.

V.B.4. Where Women Go When They Leave Transition House and Why:

As we've seen, residents begin to deal with the practical aspects of their situations and prepare themselves to cope with the problems of the future. Many residents' comments indicate that they emerge from Transition House with confidence, feeling stronger and independent, full of resolve to take realistic steps to change their lives with or without their husbands. Others have ambivalent feelings and regard the problems ahead as overwhelming. They decide to return home to an unchanged situation with their husbands. Some residents simply disappear from Transition House without telling anyone where they are going.

During the research period, 11 Transition House residents did not advise workers of their destination. Of those women whose destination is known,41 went to a new apartment without their husbands. Twenty-four returned home to their husbands and unchanged situations. Thirty-two women returned home to changed situations: in 14 of these cases their husbands had left; in 18 cases, changes in their situations involved husbands' agreeing to marriage counselling, alcohol treatment programs, and/or mental health counselling; promising to "talk the problem out" or to allow their wives more freedom; signing a marriage contract drawn up by lawyers; or "admitting some responsibility at last." Twenty-two women indicated they were going to stay with relatives or friends or in temporary accommodation such as the YWCA or motels. Ten women said they were leaving Vancouver, in three cases to stay with relatives in another city or town.

In analysing the information provided on the research file sheets, it is possible to suggest some correlations between a woman's length of stay at Transition House and her destination on leaving. For example, of the 72 women who stayed at the House for a period of one week or less only 18% left to go to a new apartment. The numbers of women deciding to set out on their own increases to 65% of the total who stayed for three weeks or more at Transition House. Similarly, it appears that the women who stayed a shorter time at the House were much more likely to return home to unchanged situations.

One can also draw correlations between employment and destination upon departure from Transition House. It is noteworthy that none of the women who returned home to unchanged situations was employed. Unfortunately, lack of complete information precludes analysis of a potentially more significant correlation: women's decisions regarding destination and the frequency or severity of assaults they'd suffered.

As noted in the introduction, it is important to avoid simplistic conclusions characteristic of many analyses of wife battering, and to focus instead on the experiences and situations of battered women themselves. In the residents' interviews conducted during this research, the women's comments provide much insight into the decisions they made about the future. Similarly, the comments by Transition House workers, based on their daily experience of talking with residents about these decisions, are taken into account for the insights they provide.

Many residents viewed their responsibility for holding their marriages together as a determining factor in their decision to return home to their husbands. As we've seen, the notion that maintaining the marriage is the woman's purview is reinforced and upheld by the policies and practices of the mental health profession as well as by police, legal and social services. Concomitant to this, the sense of fault or incompetence, which many women expressed and many husbands and institutions reinforced, results in women believing that if they change their behaviour, their situation too will change. Concerns for their children's emotional and economic welfare, fear of loneliness and isolation, and recognition of women's social and economic dependence are additional major factors in many women's decision-making. Finally, as we've noted repeatedly during this report, women's lack of protection from assault is a problem. It engenders in some women a sense of hopelessness, in others, on the contrary, an urgent determination to protect themselves and their children by leaving their violent husbands. Informants' comments about their feelings when they were at or just leaving Transition House elaborate these points.

One woman's statement of persistent hope that she could maintain her marriage, that it was not really over, reflects many other informants' feelings:

> If I could just get rid of the memory of all the bumps and bruises, then I might try again. We need time apart. I hope he'll keep in touch for the sake of the children.

Other women's comments on their dilemmas illustrate both the anger they feel at their husbands' behaviour and their sense of sadness and failure at the prospect of their marriages' ending. For example, this comment from a woman who subsequently decided to return to her husband:

> I feel happy and sad and pissed off. I'm sad it didn't work out, but after you talk to someone and it just goes in one ear and out the other, the best thing to do is leave...but I've been thinking I was so used to him - maybe I did the wrong thing, you know, starting over and all that.

One informant who decided she and her child would be "better off by ourselves," acknowledged that when she was leaving her husband, she felt angry and inadequate:

> What I felt in the end was madness and rage and if only I was bigger I could get him back.

Many Transition House workers said a woman's guilt over her failed marriage is a major factor in her decision to try again, noting that, even in the face of violence, marriage is a "hard bond to break." Several workers also pointed out that, in addition to advice from "helping professionals" which often influences women to take sole responsibility for redeeming their marriages and trying again, many husbands court their wives to persuade them to try again. They send them flowers and gifts, and take them out to dinner. Several informants said they were afraid they would "fall for" idle promises and described the pressure their husbands applied. One woman provided the following account:

> I had dinner with him last week to talk about settling our affairs. He spent most of the time trying to talk me into going back. He is saying he is wrong: he says I can have friends and go out and go to work and that he won't go into any more rages. He said he has stopped drinking and is drinking lemonade. At dinner he had five or six scotches and two or three beers!

Transition House workers said they had observed many situations in which a woman is persuaded to reconcile by her husband's promises. He agrees to seek counselling, but once she has returned to him, he stops. One worker, who had been battered herself, said it's understandable that women believe these promises:

> You have to learn for yourself that it will happen again. I wouldn't have believed he wouldn't change.

Another worker pointed out that "it is easy to forget how horrible things were." One resident's comment illustrates this point:

> When he talked me into going back I had nightmares. I consulted my church, my family, everyone wanted me to go back. And time makes me forget many things, or misinterpret them.

Several workers commented on the pressure women feel as a result of their husbands' childlike behaviour. These husbands need to be taken care of, as children do, and many threaten self-destructive behaviour if their wives leave them.

In many cases, a woman's concern that her children have a father works against her own and her children's best interests. Transition House staff noted that these concerns, and the legal system's usual practice of allowing fathers unsupervised access to their children, make the women vulnerable. Children are often intimidated or coerced by their fathers to reveal where they and their mothers are living or to urge the women to return home.

Several workers commented on the difficulties many residents had envisioning an independent life. They said it is important to appreciate the fact of women's real emotional ties to their husbands, and some women's preference for a "familiar hell versus the fear of living alone."

Women's social and economic dependence and many battered women's stated anxiety for their economic future has been frequently noted. Transition House workers pointed out, in addition, that unrealistically low social assistance allowances exacerbate these concerns. One worker spoke of the "class jump" some women face in ending their marriages, and how this acts as a deterrent. Women whose standard of living was comfortable would have to go on welfare in order to support and care for their children. Another staff member contended that "unless women have a practical alternative, they will always see going back as a more positive move."

And finally, many women's past experiences made it clear to them that they would not be protected from their husbands' assaults, even if they left their marriages. Some residents reported feeling hopeless about the future because they were afraid they would never be safe. Nevertheless, most informants regarded leaving their husbands and facing the difficulties that were sure to lie ahead as a better risk than returning to their husbands. As one woman replied, when asked if she had any fears about the future:

> Are you kidding? What could happen to me that would be worse than what's happened so far.

In summary, Transition House is used by battered women as a refuge and an opportunity to make decisions about the future in a safe and supportive environment. It is a time to take practical actions to improve their situations regardless of their ultimate decisions about their marriages. Their choices are constrained by the structures and values of society that hold women responsible for making their marriages successful and effectively inhibit social or economic independence for women. In reaching their decisions, battered women have to come to terms with concerns about what is best for their children; how to survive financially; where can they live; how they will combat the loneliness they fear; and will they ever be physically safe. The questions so often posed to those who work with battered women - why do they stay? why do they go back to their husbands? - imply incorrectly an image of the battered woman as an individual wholly in control of her situation and hence completely responsible for it. The information gathered during this research project finally answers those questions. Women's statements of their experience and the data collected on their situations support what one worker described as the greatest reward of working with battered women:

> We see the struggle whether they go home or go out. It's nice to be around that kind of courage - gutsy and fundamental...it's an honour to be so close to something so real, courageous.

V.B.5. Benefits and Limitations of Transition House:

Without exception, the residents interviewed for this research project were positive in their assessment of Transition House. A few women also offered criticisms, as well as suggestions for improvements. Most of the residents' comments are reported in Section V.B.3. regarding the use women made of Transition House. To reiterate, residents said they benefitted from being at Transition House because they felt safe there, with other people around to help, in a location unknown to their husbands who might try to find or harass them. The residents' sense of security was enhanced by their confidence in the workers' competence and willingness to give advice and assistance in dealing with legal or social service matters. Further, they derived comfort from being among women who'd had similar experiences. The support of the residents and the workers' positive feedback were identified as helpful to many women in building their self-respect. Many also said they were able to think clearly and develop a perspective on their own situations as a result of being safe and free from assaults, having time to think things through, and recognizing that they were not alone, that other women had suffered as they had. Transition House staff were described as friendly, cheerful, supportive, empathetic, understanding, non-judgemental and respectful of the residents' right to make their own decisions. However, one woman suggested staff should be more directive. Most residents appreciated the support that resulted from workers' always finding time to talk with them, although one woman felt the workers were often too busy for that.

From staff interviews, it is clear that the benefits identified by residents are in fact priorities workers have set for the Transition House service. Workers' comments portray Transition House as a service with limitations, but with special benefits for battered women. The major ones are safe shelter and support. Workers identified the contact battered women have with each other - both residents and ex-residents who return for visits - as most important in developing perspective and getting support. It provides a significant contrast with the isolation so many have experienced. They give and get support and understanding. The result is a boost to their self-respect and self-image, as they see other women from similar circumstances standing up for themselves and taking steps to improve their situations. Staff commented also on the significance for many residents of seeing the workers, as women not unlike themselves, doing whatever work needed to be done, either housework or advocacy. It offered a vivid illustration of their potential to function in both the private world of home and family and the public world of the community and legal and social services. Several workers said they thought Transition House gave a woman a new, positive experience of herself.

The staff's comments emphasized that Transition House is basically a crisis intervention service where battered women can get practical help. It is not, several noted, a treatment or therapy centre; nor should it be. As reported earlier, residents stressed the advantages to them of just having other women, residents and workers, to talk with. Several said they had gained most from that rather than from any counselling by the workers. One woman, in fact, was critical of some staff whom she felt "came on like amateur psychologists." Most workers were very specific in their statements against a therapeutic approach, commenting that it is "dangerous"; "women aren't ready for that"; "they don't need it"; and "it suggests there are right answers, when there really are not." Several staff members said it was an advantage not to be professionally trained to diagnose problems and women's behaviour in a medical, psychiatric framework. One worker said to do that kind of analysis or diagnosis was wrong because the problem is a social one, not an individual, interactional problem. Another said such an approach would result in women being told what to do by yet another person (in this case a Transition House worker) when this coercion has too often been their previous negative experience. Workers emphasized the importance of respecting the residents' right and responsibility to make their own decisions. Since residents are, in effect, "a captive audience" while they are at Transition House, to "hand out counselling" would be an infringement of residents' rights. Some workers feared that it would seem like women have to accept counselling in return for shelter, safety, and practical help. Other staff members pointed to the practical problems in counselling residents, such as staff taking on too much, and the inappropriateness of beginning a counselling process when it is clear most residents will leave Transition House after a short stay. Still, some staff said counselling is beneficial.

However, workers did stress the self discipline that they require of themselves to pay attention to residents' feelings, to ensure time to talk with them and listen to them. There is a fine line, many felt, between this approach and more formal counselling techniques. Some staff said they are trying to develop new and more suitable counselling methods. In any case, residents indicated that the workers successfully create a supportive environment in Transition House, and effectively provide practical assistance to battered women.

Many workers, nevertheless, were dissatisfied with the extent of their effectiveness and identified limitations in the Transition House service. The need for more time for staff to do follow-up work with ex-residents was a major concern and, in fact, in May 1980 each worker was allotted ten hours for follow-up per month; on a six month trial basis. Several staff members focused on the need for Transition House workers to do more educational work with legal and social service professionals and in the schools to raise awareness. One worker hoped that eventually there would be a better balance between the various aspects of their work, crisis work and educational work or outreach to the community. Another commented that until that happens, although Transiton House is very necessary, it is just "a Band-aid measure."

While extension of the service is considered desirable by several workers, most also felt that more Transition Houses, providing basic crisis intervention services, are urgently needed. The statistics gathered during this research project, and statistics from previous years (see page 103) show that as many women were turned away as were served and, thus substantiate the need for more houses.

In addition, both residents and workers commented on feeling over-crowded at Transition House. They pointed out the advantages, for everyone involved, of a larger house. A larger space would provide more privacy and quiet for residents to "think things through in peace" and for staff to meet to discuss and assess their work. A formal request for a larger house had been made to the Ministry of Human Resources and, at the time of writing, a decision on the request is pending.

Several workers and residents also commented on the need for a cleaning service, like the ones utilized by group homes to improve the conditions in the House. (In September 1980, Transition House got a cleaning service.).

For the most part, the limitations to Transition House's effectiveness that were identified by staff, are products of the context in which the service operates - i.e., the community resources and legal services available to staff and residents. As reported in Sections V.A.2. and V.A.3. describing the responses battered women usually encounter from these institutions and agencies, fundamental policy changes are required, as well as changes in legislation, before these resources will be useful to battered women. In addition, the problems women in Canadian society generally face with regard to employment, equal pay, childcare facilities, and inequality under the law were noted by many workers as particularly severe obstacles for battered women. In large part, these factors are integral to a society in which wife battering is "inevitable." Effective services for battered women must be supported while these larger social problems are addressed.

At the same time, Transition House workers did identify specific practical improvements in social and legal services that would facilitate an effective response to wife battering. These included ensuring protection for battered women through the development of alternatives to restraining orders, which are generally ineffective; adjusting family court procedures to reduce the time a woman has to wait for a hearing/appointment; and instituting more severe sentences for wife assault in order to make it clear to husbands and society at large that such behaviour is not acceptable. Supervised access to children was suggested as a means open to family court to inhibit men's manipulation of children to get to their wives.* Social workers, family court counsellors, police officers and officials, financial aid workers, and so on, should be educated on the realities of wife battering to improve their response to battered women. In addition, some workers hoped this broader education of professionals would enable Transition House staff to decrease their dependence on the few sympathetic professionals they rely on now. Other workers noted the paucity of understanding doctors, lawyers, and counsellors. More interpretation and translation services are needed, according to several staff members, to provide assistance to immigrant women. More services and programs for children would be useful. A greater realization that Transition House is a necessary service is, in the view of several workers, essential. Others said support groups for battered women and more second stage residences, such as Munroe House, would also fill an urgent need.

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* See Appendix V , presentation of "Children from Violent Homes" pages 4-9, for a more complete discussion of this problem and suggestions for dealing with it.

Due to the nature of the interviews with staff, sessions designed to elicit the workers' observations and knowledge of wife battering, and their expertise in working with battered women, their suggestions and proposals for improving resources were not elaborate or detailed. They are reported here to stimulate consideration of them and to point out areas for future work by those officials who are responsible for legal and social policy, and those groups and individuals who also work with battered women.

In summary, residents' assessments of Transition House indicate the house and its staff provide an effective and much needed service that is greatly appreciated by its recipients. The workers themselves are clearly realistic about the benefits and limitations of the services. The limitations to Transition House's effectiveness and the focus of workers' suggestions for improved service are, to a large extent, social problems outside its control and mandate. These problems, deriving from woman's inequality under the law and her social and economic dependence, are integral to the prevalence of wife battering in our society. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are also obstacles to effectively dealing with the consequences of wife battering.

VI. Summary

Throughout this report we have provided a picture of wife battering and its circumstances, from the perspective of battered women themselves. We have seen that the incidence of wife battering cuts across social class. Furthermore, women from non-violent as well as from violent family backgrounds can be victims of wife assault by husbands from similarly diverse backgrounds. Women do not like to be beaten and they do not deserve to be beaten. The assaults women suffer consist of violent physical and verbal attacks, isolation, threats of injury and/or murder, and rape. Men's socially ascribed authority over women in marriage and women's economic dependence on their husbands are the cornerstones of wife battering.

It is clear that wife assault has tragic and horrifying physical and emotional consequences for women. It is equally clear that women's attempts to get help and to change their situations are thwarted by policies and practices of institutions and agencies that deny the consequences and realities of wife battering and instead blame the victims. They reinforce women's imprisonment in the privacy of the family as an institution. Thus, wife battering is allowed to happen.

The social problems, which affect all women in our society, exacerbate the difficulties battered women face in dealing with the consequences of wife assault. Transition House is a source of support and practical assistance for battered women. It enables women to begin the process of improving their situations. Thus, Transition House provides an effective and essential response to wife battering.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

A primary aim in undertaking this research project has been to advance a clearer understanding of wife assault by providing, from the perspective of battered women themselves, a description of wife battering and how its consequences are dealt with. Conclusions and recommendations have emerged from their description. They are presented here as a reflection and analysis of the accounts, concerns and needs of the Transition House residents and workers who participated in this research project. However, to concentrate on conclusions and recommendations in isolation would do our informants a disservice. These issues must be viewed in conjunction with the overall context of battered women's lives described in the body of this report.

The conclusions that have emerged from this research centre on what we understand about the circumstances and consequences of wife battering. In addition, we submit recommendations for dealing more effectively with the problem of wife battering and suggestions for working with battered women.

VII.A. Conclusions - The Circumstances and Consequences of Wife Battering:

1. Wife assault is a reality in our society because men have the socially ascribed authority to make the rules in marriage; and because violence against their wives is accepted, in the eyes of society, as an appropriate instrument of control. The social and economic structure of marriage, as an institution in which women are dependent on men, requires this assignment of authority to men in order to uphold the institution.

2. Wife battering consists of physical, psychological and/or sexual violence committed against women by their husbands. It may be a sporadic occurrence or a recurrent feature of their marriages. The circumstances vary. Challenges to the man's authority, his reaction against his wife's pregnancy or the birth of their child, financial problems, or his jealousy - all can result in violence. Attempts by men at negotiation to resolve conflicts are conspicuously absent.

3. The people involved in wife battering come from a variety of backgrounds: stable and unstable; all social and economic classes; from parental homes that incorporated violence and from those that did not. The women who are assaulted are educated and uneducated, economically dependent and independent. There is no stereotyped portrait of the battered woman.

4. Though no one deserves to be beaten, an analysis of the specific circumstances of wife assault indicates that the violence is not only unwarranted by the woman's behaviour but, in fact, incidental to it. Women's attempts within their marriages to avoid or preclude assaults, by altering their own behaviour, are notably unsuccessful. The situation is often one in which she "can do nothing right."

5. Women do not like to be beaten. They try to stop the violence; while at the same time they try to meet their socially ascribed responsibility for preserving their marriages. The policies and practices of the agencies and institutions, such as the medical and helping professions and the legal system, from which women seek assistance, incorrectly construct wife battering as an interactional

problem. This results in the women being blamed for provoking the assaults they've suffered and they are held responsible for rehabilitating their assailants. In addition, this approach absolves men of their responsibility for their own behaviour and effectively reinforces the women's entrapment in a violent environment.

6. Battered women, out of self-preservation and/or fear for their children, do try to leave their violent marriages (over 70% of the population for this research project) - in many cases, they try repeatedly to leave. However, the structures and values of society effectively inhibit women's social or economic independence. Battered women face the same difficulties of inequality in job opportunities and pay scales and the lack of child care that all women face in our society. If women seek income assistance as a means of supporting themselves and their children, their income from welfare payments and other benefits combined will be well below the poverty line. Affordable, adequate housing is hard to find. Support services, to help battered women to deal with the difficulties of being single mothers and the effects of the assaults they have endured, are scarce. Facilities and programs to help children to deal with the consequences for them of wife battering are virtually non-existent. Even after women have left their violent marriages they are at risk of continued assaults. The legal options under both federal and provincial laws do not protect battered women. Accepted legal procedures and exceptions written into the law to protect the unity and privacy of the family as an institution make women vulnerable to their husbands' pursuit and violent revenge for leaving.

7. Current theories that seek to account for wife battering are over-simplifications. The empirical data presented in this report does not substantiate them. In addition, many theories and approaches, particularly those focussed on psychological or interactional factors, tend to provide insupportable and irrelevant excuses or justifications for wife assault. Furthermore, they tend to mystify the causes and reduce battered women's capacity to understand or respond to their situations.

VII.B. Recommendations for Dealing More Effectively With the Problem of Wife Battering:

(1) Services:

Transition Houses are widely recognized, among those who are working on the problem of wife assault, as the most viable alternative service available to many battered women. The assessment of Vancouver Transition House by residents substantiates this point. However, most Transition Houses operate at 100% capacity and are forced to turn away women, because of lack of space. More Transition Houses are clearly needed. Incorporating child care services as part of Transition House services is also essential.

Transition Houses cannot and should not be expected to solve all the problems battered women face. Many battered women may not need or be able to go to a Transition House to deal with their situations. In addition, ongoing support services, post-Transition House, were identified as a major need by residents. Support groups and services, designed specifically to assist battered women, are required as resources for these women.

In Canada, there is only one second-stage house for battered women: Vancouver's Munroe House. More second-stage facilities are necessary for those women who require supplementary assistance in establishing their independence from their husbands.

Furthermore, programs to assist children to deal with the consequences of wife assault in their families are virtually non-existent. They must be developed and supported.

RECOMMENDATION I

> **All levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal must provide official recognition of the need for the range of services women require as a result of wife assault. This recognition must take the form of support and funding for Transition Houses, support services, second stage facilities for battered women , and programs for children whose mothers have been assaulted.**

(2) Changes in Policy and Practices:

In cases of wife assault, social welfare policy based on maintaining the family unit, as an economic alternative to having women and children dependent on welfare, defeats its purpose. The policy, in fact, serves to increase the family's dependence for survival on social service assistance and institutions. Of more serious consequence, the policy and its implementation in poverty level income assistance benefits traps women and their children in a dangerous environment. Residency requirements as a precondition of eligibility for assistance is a particular problem for battered women who have to travel outside their home community to find protection.

RECOMMENDATION II

> Social welfare policy must be amended to reflect the fact that a woman and her children constitute a viable family unit. Policies and procedures must be revised to ensure realistic levels of support and financial assistance for single mothers and their children.

Lack of protection is a major problem faced by battered women. It is a major short-coming of law enforcement and legal services in Canada. Policies based on non-intervention, as a means of upholding the privacy of the family, leave the members of the family at risk. To deal with wife assault, an arrest policy, changes in family court procedures, and appropriate sentencing of batterers are required. These measures would serve to protect the women involved and make it clear to batterers and society at large that wife assault is not acceptable behaviour. Current practices and policies convey the opposite message. Supervising batterers' access to their children, and the relative practical merits of peace bonds, *ex parte* interim orders and injunctions need to be considered.

RECOMMENDATION III

> Law enforcement and justice system policy and procedures must be revised to give priority to protection for the woman in wife assault cases. Law reform may in fact be required. However, in the meantime, procedures and administrative practices must be revised and changed as necessary to ensure protection for battered women.

(3) Need for further work:

Although Native Indian women and immigrant women have not been distinguished from the other battered women in this report, it is obvious that their cultural and economic situations exacerbate the problems of wife assault for them. The difficulties of finding refuge from a violent home, receiving practical assistance and support services are acute for women whose culture and language are not understood.

RECOMMENDATION IV

> Support services and programs based on the recognition of cultural and language differences must be established and adequately funded.

(4) Education:

The preponderance of myths and inaccurate theories about wife assault are serious obstacles to effective action to deal with the problem. Education of workers in the medical and helping professions and in law enforcement and the justice system has been based, primarily, on myths and theories. Battered women suffer the consequences when they seek help from these professionals.

The misconceptions of wife assault that prevail in the general public's attitudes towards battered women inhibit public support for needed programs and services.

Society cannot afford to ignore this problem. To do so jeapordizes not only women and their families, but also communities. Training programs for professionals and public education are needed to combat the myths and misunderstanding.

RECOMMENDATION V

> All levels of government must make funds available for educational programs, developed by Transition House workers (and others who have expertise in working with battered women). These programs should be designed for (a) professionals, to enable them to respond more effectively to battered women, and (b) the general public, to advance understanding of wife assault and support for policies and services to deal with the problem.

(5) Suggestions for working effectively with battered women:

The accounts of their experiences generously given to researchers by Transition House residents form the basis for the view of wife battering presented in this report. In addition, these accounts and the interviews with Transition House staff, who by virtue of their daily work are experts on this issue, serve to increase the currently limited body of knowledge on wife battering and provide insights into effective ways of working with battered women. Although this information is extensively reported in the preceding pages of this report, we outline it here in the form of guidelines or suggestions.

Protection of a battered woman from assaults should be the first priority of anyone trying to help. This requires accepting as valid the woman's statement of fear or her account of the assault. In most cases, a woman will have hesitated and questioned herself to decide whether she is warranted in seeking help or deserves assistance. A woman does not lightly risk suffering the stigma and guilt and feelings of failure associated with seeking help and, thereby, exposing to "outsiders" the fact that she has been assaulted. Listening to her and believing her are prerequisites for helping her.

She can be assisted by the provision of whatever practical advice and assistance is possible. Empathy, support, and friendship are helpful; traditional psychiatric therapy and theories are not. Relating to her experience is essential: she is not alone; her problems are not unique; every woman is a potential or past victim of wife assault. She should be encouraged to talk about herself and her own feelings: she has most likely been discouraged from doing so and it will help her to develop a perspective on her situation and to decide what to do about it. She can be assisted by having the options and alternatives she might consider outlined. Respect for her decisions is crucial: her situation has no doubt developed over time and the process of changing her situation may be slow and difficult. She has a right, as anyone does, to change her mind, to be contradictory in her thoughts and actions. Judgemental responses to her decisions will result in hesitation to seek help in the future. Finally, it is important to encourage her to keep in touch in whatever ways are possible without putting her in danger of further assaults.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I - RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF

1. What do they know about wife battering:

    - theories, observations, common sense knowledge.
    - preconceived ideas? have they changed?
    - personal learning process.

2. Functions,duties, qualifications of Transition House workers:

    - what do they do daily - differences day/night; weekday/weekend.
    - what qualities does it take - what kinds of skills, approaches, training, judgement?
    - relationship between staff and residents (problems of role?, social worker?, maid?).

3. Structure, dynamics, philosophy of this Transition House:

    - decision making
    - policy making, how problems are handled, what it's like working for MHR, what changes with new government, etc.
    - staff complement (age range, skills, roles).
    - shift work - problems, benefits.

4. Community Resources:

    - what are helpful, not helpful, needed.
    - what referrals, what requests.

5. Feelings and personal philosophy:

    - what are rewards, stresses.
    - effects of working there.
    - expectations, ideals, how do they survive?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RESIDENTS

1. Family background: his, hers, why they got married, when, what she expected of marriage, had she lived on her own before marriage.

2. Circumstances of the beatings or abuse:
    - when did they start, under what sorts of circumstances did they occur, what he says (accuses her of as a reason for the beatings), frequency, effect of preganacies, alcohol, jealousy, not allowing friends.
    - kinds of abuse - physical, psychological, forced sexual activity, threats against her.
    - does his violence go beyond her, did he abuse the child(ren), did he abuse the child(ren) sexually...
    - does his violence go beyond the home.

3. What marriage is like otherwise:
    - children's relationship with father, mother.
    - other areas of responsibility, decisions re: spending money, what is the family income?(does she know).
    - her concerns about the children.

4. Her response to the beatings or abuse:
    - what she did within marriage to try to change things.
    - attempts to get help - family, police, counsellors, etc. (if police contacted - were charges laid?).
    - what would help, what would have helped?
    - has she ever left before?
    - her feelings about her marriage, herself.

5. Thoughts about the future:
    - what she would like.
    - what she is afraid of.
    - what she wishes for her children.
    - worries about her children.

6. Response to Transition House:
    - feelings right now.
    - observations of workers.
    - future contact.

Interview Guide for women who return:

- what reasons did she have for going back (what was the internal dialogue - what did she convince herself of, believe?).

- what happened?

Interview Guide for Immigrant Women:

- what were the expectations of the new country; did family roles change - i.e. woman become wage-earner?; loss of family support?; special problems within the immigrant community; legal problems re: status.

Interview Guide for women who have had to leave children; who wanted to leave children; whose children were abducted:

- community attitudes; agency help, if any; own feelings.

Interview Guide for women without children; women with handicaps:

- what special services needed.

RESEARCH FILE SHEET* Date arrived ________ left ________

Number on intake Card ________. Total length of stay ________ days .

Age of woman ________.

Number of children ________. Ages of Children ________

Address (hundred block, street name, & city only) ________

(Home) M.H.R. Team ________ Office Code ________ Region Number ________

Married ________ Common-law ________.

Ethnic Background: Woman's ________ Man's ________

Citizenship Status: Canadian Born ________ Naturalized Citizen ________

Immigrant Status: Sponsored: ________ Relationship to Sponsor ________

Nominated: ________ Relationship to Nominator ________

Independant: ________ Refugee: ________ Minister's Permit: ________

Why are you at Transition House? a) battering ________ b) psychological abuse ________

c)other (specify) ________

How did you find out about Transition House? ________

How long have you been in the relationship? ________

How long had you been in the relationship when the beatings started? ________

Did anyone see? ________ Did they help? ________

How often did the violence occur? ________

What physical injuries have you sustained as a result of the battering ________

____

Have you ever had medical treatment? a) hospital ________ b) family doctor ________

c) Self treatment ________ How many times? ________

Financial resources at present: a) S.A. ________ b) U.I.C. ________ c) working ________

d) dependent on husband ________ e) other (specify) ________

Job skills and/or work experience (list): ________

____

____

Education: a) grade school ________ b) high school ________ c) university ________

d) technical school ________ e) other (specify) ________

Is there anyone you can call on to help you? Yes ________ No ________

Who? a) friend ________ b) relative ________ c) Minister ________ d) Professional ________

e) other (specify) ________

Have you ever left before? Yes ________ No ________

Where did you go? ________

Did you ever try to come to Transition House before? Yes ________ No ________

*Transition House Workers, please initial all entries so we can check back for clarification.

If so, and there wasn't space, where did you go?________________

Are you taking any medication? Yes________ No ________
If yes, what?________________

STRIKING DIRECT STATEMENTS:

re: history of family violence (specify father beat mother, was beaten/abused as child, etc.):________________

re: ways the woman was isolated (from friends, family, community etc.):________________

re: description of psychological abuse:________________

re: any forced sexual activity:________________

Where did the woman go when she left Transition House?

a) home to husband, no change________ b) home to husband, change________because (specify "He joined AA" "He says he will get counselling" etc.)________________

c)home, husband left________ d) new apartment or house ________ e)B.C. Housing ________ f) friends ________ g) relatives ________ h) left town ________ i) unknown________

SERVICES CONTACTED AND USED BY RESIDENT DURING HER STAY:

F.A.W.: MHR Region________ Date requested________________
Date of first appointment________ _____
Comfort's Allowance: Granted ________ Not granted ________
reason given:________________
Social Assistance: Granted________ Not granted________
reason given:________________

S.W.: MHR Region________ Date requested______ ________
Date of first appointment ________________

Family Support Worker: MHR Region________ Date requested______________
Date of first appointment______________

Project Parent: Date requested______________
Date of first appointment______________

Post Partum: Date requested______________
Date of first appointment______________

Women's Support Group: Date requested______________
Date of first appointment ______________

U.I.C.: Yes________ No________

Manpower: Retraining________________________________
Upgrading________________________________
Other courses (specify)________________________________

Immigration:	Requested	Granted	Refused
English Language Training			
Mosaic or Translator Service			
Immigration Services			

Other Services: Homemaker________________________________
Day Care________________________________
Other:________________________________
____
____

Legal: Family Court Counsellor________
Private lawyer________
Police________
Other legal (specify)________
____
____

Separation agreement: started________
not started________
Restraining Order: Yes______ No______
Custody Order: Yes________ No________

Housing:	Successful	Unsuccessful
Red Door		
B.C. Housing		
Newspaper		
Other (specify)		

Medical: Doctor ________ Hospital Emergency________ Reach Clinic________ Dentist____
Public Health________ Pine Free Clinic________ Women's Health Collective________
Other (specify)________________________________

Mental Health: Psychiatrist________ Psychologist________ Riverview________
Community Care Team________ General Hospital -Out Patient's Psych.________
Counselling (specify)________________________________

APPENDIX II

When the Assaults Began

Length of Relationship (yrs)	At/Near Start	1/4 to 1/3 into the relationship	About Halfway	More than Halfway	Only Recently	Other Responses
less than 1	4			2	1	
1	4			2	2	2mos. after child born
2	6	1	1	2	1	since 1 month pregnant
3	5	1	1	1		
4	1		1		1	when got pregnant
5	2			2	4	
6	2	3	1			first pregnancy
7	2			2	2	
8	1				1	
9	1					
10	1	2		1		
11-15	5	1	2		2	
16-20	3				1	
21-25	3					
more than 26					3	when 7 mos. pregnant
Total number of women	40	8	6	12	18	5

APPENDIX III

Frequency of Assaults

		1, 2, or 3 times	Several times	Often or Regularly	Often and Regularly	Other Responses
	less than 1	5		1	1	
	1	2	4	1	1	
	2	1	2	2	7	
	3		1	2	5	when drinking
Length of Relationship (yrs)	4		1	2	1	
	5	2		2	3	
	6		2	1	3	
	7		2	4		
	8				1	
	9		1			
	10	1	1		2	
	15	1	1	4	3	
	20	1		1	2	
	25		1	1	1	
	more than 26	1		2		when drinking
Total number of women		14	16	23	30	2

Frequency of Assaults:

In establishing categories and in assigning responses to them, our problem was to organize the information into a form that would be manageable for ourselves, as we conducted the research, and that could be clearly and effectively presented in the report itself.

This is how responses were interpreted and assigned to categories:

- "1, 2, or 3 times" represents a numerical response of once, twice, or three times, or possibly one or two, or two or three, times, but in no case more than three.
- "Several times" represents such responses as "4 times" (in a year and a half); "once every 3 or 4 months" (in a year and a quarter); "not too often"; "not very often"; "occasionally"; "8 times"; "about every 6 months" (over 4 years); "about once a year" (over 9 years).
- "Often or regularly" includes "often"; "very often"; "lately more often"; "frequently"; "every couple of months"; "whenever he got mad"; "when money runs out"; "every few weeks"; "regularly recently." We have also included in this category a woman who did not state how often assaults occurred, but said she had had medical treatment many times.
- "Often and regularly" is an intensification of "often or regularly." What is meant by "often and regularly" are such responses as these: "about twice a month - on payday"; "3 or 4 times a month"; too many times to remember"; "every week"; "every weekend"; "every Friday night"; "twice a week"; "about every third day"; "1 to 5 times weekly."

For eight women, no information is recorded in this chart. We know the length of their relationship but we do not know how often they were assaulted. However, for seven of these women there is other information in the file sheets to indicate that assaults had probably occurred not only more than once but, in some cases, with a considerable degree of frequency:

- One woman, in a relationship of over a year, reported that beatings had begun at the start of the relationship.
- Another, in a 5-year relationship, had, over a 2-year period, been both to a hospital and a doctor for treatment of injuries.
- A woman in a 6-year relationship had suffered beatings in 4 of the 6 years and had hospital treatment.
- A woman in a 7-year relationship reported assaults beginning at or near the start.
- A woman in an 8-year relationship had been to hospital twice.
- A woman in a 9-year relationship had received hospital treatment and had been to Transition House before.
- And the 7th woman, in a relationship of from 11 to 15 years, had been to a hospital and several times to a doctor for the treatment of injuries.

APPENDIX IV

AN ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF VANCOUVER TRANSITION HOUSE

BY VALERIE MACDERMOT

Vancouver Transition House developed directly from concern for women as expressed in the Women's Movement in Vancouver in the early seventies. An ad hoc group, meeting every couple of weeks in our homes for all day sessions,founded the Women's Place, a drop-in centre in an old house at Burrard on Broadway. As volunteers there, we soon were getting phone calls and visits from women needing not only a drop-in centre, but a full time residential refuge from intolerable marital situations.

A group of us at Women's Place began meeting and working on a submission for an LIP grant to start a "Women in Transition" house. We saw the need for a safe retreat to give women a break from their situation. We felt a collective model would be best and worked towards becoming a cohesive team. Unfortunately, we were not given a grant and other jobs had to be taken. One of the members took a job with Vancouver Status of Women and interested the staff there, and the two of us left from Women's Place joined with about four from Status of Women.

We had to revise our original plan, which was to have only the women come, without their children, with the expectation that they would return to their home after a rest. We found that the situation most of the women were in was much worse than supposed; that in the majority of cases there was physical as well as mental abuse; that if the women left without the children, there was always a chance of her not getting custody; that the need then was a place for women and children and much more a leaning towards a permanent separation than we had first envisaged.

We had collected letters of support from all the "helping" people in the community. The support letters we got from the police and the Children's Aid certainly endorsed our idea totally. The need was tremendous. Unfortunately, Women's Place was torn down and we were unable to continue to have a drop-in centre. Many of us however became involved in the Women's Health Collective and Rape Relief which grew out of Women's Place and the nucleus of women who were part of the original ad hoc group.

By the summer of 1973, a strong committee composed of the two women remaining from the Women's Place group and the Status of Women staff-volunteers were approaching the city council, through Darlene Marzari, for funds and space.

The YWCA was running the Bridge Hostel at the time and there was space there. We were very apprehensive of losing control of our original concept of what Transition House would be, but we felt something would be better than nothing even though the woman in charge seemed autocratic and the set-up would be hierarchical in structure, contrary to our plan.

At the last moment, Norm Levi, then minister of Human Resources, came to our rescue and, through Children's Aid, made funds available for us to set up in a building just purchased for a group home. We very quickly hired staff and just after Christmas 1973 we opened our doors to the first women and children.*

For two weeks before this, we had all-day orientation sessions where we brainstormed every possible contingency and made our original rules.

Only two of the original group wanted to be on staff, but we deliberately did not hire anyone with a Social Work degree, to insure that no professional "trip" would be laid on any of the women. Not that there are not many Social Workers who have the "right" attitude, but we couldn't take a chance. We needed women with life experience who could directly relate to the women's situation.

So, we set out to have a warm, caring, safe environment, with sympathetic staff, who had practical knowledge of the court system, of parenting, of the social assistance system.

Whether we knew at the time or whether it grew out of our first dealing with the women I am not certain, but we soon found that the self-image of the woman was very low and that our first task was to give her a sense of her own self worth. She had been battered physically and psychologically to such an extent that she believed that she was "no good," and deserved the treatment she had received; that she was incapable of making it on her own. We therefore quickly realized that it was imperative that she start doing things for herself and her children. We gave her the phone numbers but she had to make the appointment herself. We accompanied her but she did the talking.

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* In 1974, the house was placed under the jurisdiction of the Vancouver Resources Board which was set up by the provincial government to oversee social services. In January of 1978, after the Vancouver Resources Board was disbanded, Vancouver Transition House formally joined the provincial Ministry of Human Resources as a permanently funded resource and workers, as a result, became Human Resource staff.

We complimented her on her children, on her cooking. Anything we could do to assist her in seeing herself as a capable worthwhile person was essential!

We strove to show by our example that women are capable of doing everything. We also tried to show a co-operative model of living rather than a competitive one by having all staff equal in position and salary, by all of us doing the same job, by pitching in to help clean and cook and do dishes.

We could not preach feminism, but we could show that all the work women do is worthwhile and that pride can be taken in any chore. That "women's work" is important. That it was okay for us to be paid for housework, for shopping, for childcare. Of course, also that women can do much more. That a well-rounded life with many in the home and outside jobs, many elements, is possible for women, not just men. That co-operation is needed, and that there should be no definition of role along gender/sexual lines.

Most of our time is taken up dealing directly with the women and the rewards of the job are many. Every time a woman takes one small step towards independence, be it phoning about an apartment, applying for social assistance for just herself and her children, deciding to lay an assault charge or talking to her husband and telling him she is not coming back until he makes some changes - we feel good. So often people say that I must find my job very depressing but that has not been my experience or the experience of most of the women who have worked at the house. The strength of women under the most stressful circumstances is wonderful to see.

One of my observations has been that the women with children are much less liable to have psychological problems than those without. It is almost as if the mother knows that she cannot break down because she has children dependent on her. Also, the other side of this coin is that she feels "needed." She is not getting all her desire to be needed (which is basic for all of us) from her relationship with her husband.

The woman without children usually has a more completely interdependent role with her partner, feels she owes him so much that she can't live without him, but also that he needs her and will kill himself, drink himself to death or do something else terribly destructive if she leaves.

We do, of course, often see this same feeling of maternalistic concern towards the husband in women with children. The attitude that he is like another child and she must take care of him is very prevalent. We have actually had six husbands commit suicide but in these cases the women have ultimately been able to accept that he was responsible for his own behaviour and that she was not to blame. It is very difficult though when a man calls and tells the woman that if she doesn't return he will kill himself - making her responsible for him, and also giving her a sense of how important she is to him. This is the ultimate weapon the men use, but it is very difficult for us to encourage the woman to return, when we know nothing will be changed - that that dependence is not really a caring for the woman, but only for his own comfort, physically, emotionally and financially. The new Family Relations Act with family assets to be divided equally is certainly encouraging more men to keep their wives with them, because they know that if they separate, they will have to divide the goodies. So often even though a woman has worked and put in equal money as well as having done most of the housekeeping and childcare, the man has handled all the money and feels it is his house, his car, his bank account and will try and have his wife return to him so there will be no division, even though he has no real desire to have a good relationship, nor is capable of treating this woman as an equal partner.

There are of course exceptions, but most women who return do not really expect there to be any improvement. They go back very sadly, having succumbed to his pleading and her strong sense of obligation - that she married him "for better or worse," that she "made her bed and must lie in it," that it is "women's lot," that it is her responsibility to "keep the marriage together."

There is a percentage of women who don't go back and we in no way underestimate the difficulty of this decision. The chances are that it will mean a basement suite with two small children and really not enough money to live, even at the poverty level. Welfare rates are well below the poverty level as set out by Statistics Canada.

The rates for housing have become a little more realistic, but the maintenance rates are still impossibly low. "Welfare bum" is a misnomer - no one would want to live at this level of subsistence if it was possible not to.

APPENDIX V

TEXT OF THE PRESENTATION ON "CHILDREN FROM VIOLENT HOMES" GIVEN TO VANCOUVER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE OF FAMILY COURT WORKERS, PARKSVILLE, B.C., 1980

BY SUE SOPP-GILSON

I'd like to begin by giving you a brief description of the kinds of kids we see at Transition House and how some of them react to the crisis that is taking place in their families.

Virtually all the children we see at Transition House show above average stress-related physical or emotional symptoms. They are unsettled and anxious because yet another insecurity has been put on their plates to deal with, the move away from their homes. That entails a separation from school and friends, fathers, toys,everything except their mothers and whatever small items she managed to pack with her when she left. A few of the kids don't even have their own pyjamas, so they're "freaked out". In addition to this general anxiety, many of them have been threatened or have heard their mother being threatened with pretty dire consequences about what will happen if "they aren't home when dad gets home from work". They seem really torn between feeling relieved that they aren't at home and being terrified about not being there. This leads, especially with school age children, to a heavy pressuring "number" that they do on their moms. "Come on Mom, we have to go home, what's Dad going to say when he gets home and finds us not there?"

Once the kids make it through the first 24 hours at the house and the immediate risk of consequences is over, they go through a period of obvious relief. It's sort of a party atmosphere for them to have lots of other children around to play with and lots of attentive adults. They have the staff taking them out to parks, playgrounds, etc., and spending lots of time talking with them. A lot of these kids have lived in very isolated situations where all their time and their mother's time has had to be accounted for - trips out of the home were few and far between and even when they did get out on some sort of recreational trip, the tension between their parents made it difficult for them to relax and enjoy what was happening. So for the first few days, it's like a picnic.

Within the next few days, one of the dynamics that show up, particularly in the little boys, is a mimicking of the male role model with a lot of aggression towards their mother and the staff and other children in the house. We had a two-and-a-half year old boy at the house not long ago who was into routinely smashing his head into his mother's as hard as he could whenever she wouldn't do as he asked. There have been a number of children who literally couldn't be left in the playroom unsupervised without beaning some other child over the head. We see a lot of the "child as tyrant" - little kids who will stop at nothing to gain control of their mothers and other kids in the family. This same little boy who was into head smashing, had complete control over his mother and his two older sisters to the point where he could sit at the table and drop a spoon and have three people under the table after it within 15 seconds with a lot of heavy duty whining, screaming and if all else failed he'd hold his breath till he turned blue and passed out. These kids have learned how to control people around them and are not above delivering a kick or punch to get their point across.

These kids have usually heard a lot of undermining and putting down of their mothers' parenting skills and have heard her generally being devalued as a parent - so we're faced with a child who has little or no controls. The father has been the family disciplinarian and the mothers are faced with the difficulty of establishing some kind of discipline controls with them, overnight. They have to take the role of setting limits. With the more aggressive children, the mothers often resort to yelling, screaming, threatening and hitting them. We have a rule at the house that mothers are not allowed to hit their children. While we realize that this rule sometimes removes the only disciplinary tool that the mother may know, it does offer immediate on-the-spot opportunities to engage the mom in discussions about alternative methods of dealing with this aggression emerging from her children.

One of the other common characteristics of children who come from abusive families, one that I've noticed especially among little girls, is the withdrawn and submissive person, the child who is trying very hard not to be noticed. These kids are in a way more heartbreaking than the ones who can act out their aggressions because they are generally quite far behind developmentally, in their speech, physical co-ordination, and social skills within their own peer group and with adults. They often exhibit a lot of "bubbling out" symptoms, severe skin rashes, hair falling out, problems around food - either there are many foods they can't digest or are allergic to, or they are wanting food constantly and are overweight even at very early ages. The other side of that particular coin is the "failure to thrive" children, the ten month old baby who is the size of a three month old. We have had a little girl at the house a number of times who is aged five but is the size of a very small two year old. These children often suffer more than the aggressive children because they are usually victims of a lot of verbal abuse. The mothers have fallen into a pattern of picking on the child in a similar manner to which she's being picked on. It seems these children can't do anything right. They receive no positive input and are constantly being called names, like silly, stupid, lazy and so on.

Placement in the family is also a factor. We see little girls aged three and four who are expected to be mothers' helpers with smaller babies in the family. They are constantly ordered about to carry out tasks that are way beyond their capabilities, and then criticized for not being able to fulfill these functions.

Without even getting into the children who are actually being physically harmed, we are already looking at a child who has witnessed some pretty wretched scenes. They've seen their mothers beaten, thrown into walls, through windows, her eyes blackened and teeth knocked out. These children have been receiving an education in how to cope around violence and fear. Often they have seen and lived through years of brutality, so much a part of their home life that "normal" life goes on again as if nothing had happened. A story from one of my ten year old boys drove this point home to me. He told me of Christmas dinner at his home one night when he and his mother and sister were seated around the table with everything all set, the turkey waiting to be carved. Their father came into the room. He was irritated about something. He picked up the potato masher and pulverized the turkey in front of them all. He said that when he and his sister talked about it later they called it the "year the turkey got killed twice". When he finished telling me the story he was looking at me with a strange look in his eyes.

I asked him what the look was about and he said, "Do you think that is weird?". He really wasn't sure whether that was normal behaviour or not.

I don't think there is a child who has lived in this kind of environment who is not in need of lots of special care and attention. There is a serious lack of services to this particular group.

Now I'd like to address the question of access and supervised visiting. During the settling period of the first few days, the children are usually aware that their mothers are talking about not returning home. If the mothers have left as the direct result of a physical assault, they sometimes go to family court and lay a charge against the husband, consult lawyers, see a doctor and set some wheels in motion with regard to securing some financial support,usually from the local Human Resources Office. It's at this time that we have an opportunity to do some fairly effective intervention for the children, particularly those who are verbal and are able to talk about things within their families that have been difficult for them to handle. It is my feeling that the professionals who are dealing with these families are not taking the children enough into account when deciding whether there are to be visits with their fathers. Many children are glad to be away from their fathers for a least this initial period and have little desire to see them. I have noticed that these children have a great deal of fear about being found by their fathers. When I'm taking them out on trips they become very nervous if they see a car like their dad's or they will think that we're being followed. I think that the children may need a cooling off period similar to their mothers and many times what happens is that a social worker or court worker is being pressured by the father to see the kids. They respond to the pressure by passing it on to the mother and insisting on visiting being set up immediately. It has been my experience that a lot of times these visits are disastrous. While the family is housed at Transition House, the visits that occur are usually supervised. One reason for this is that many of the mothers have some anxiety about the father taking the children and thereby securing a lever to pressure her to return to the home. We have had a number of cases where children have been taken out for visits and not been returned. So the visits are to be supervised. There is often difficulty in finding someone to fill this role. I've supervised quite a number of visits that have been set up and have found every one of them to be very tense and upsetting for the children. In most cases the fathers use this time with the children to try to get information about where they are staying, also to try to pressure the kids into "talking sense" into their mothers and getting her to return home. If the children show any support for their mother's position they are regaled with tales of what a no good person she is - i.e., "If your mother really loved you she wouldn't break up our family this way."

Children who have been removed from their homes for reasons of violence certainly do not need the added pressure of being forced to visit with someone whom they currently fear. It is clearly an unfair system where a woman receives a no-contact order and thereby establishes her right to refrain from communicating with her husband, but her children are forced to continue contact whether they choose to or not.

If conditions of access or supervised visits are to be made in a court order, the worker should see to it that their interviews with the family include a series of questions concerning the children: How do the children relate to each of the parents?; Have there been any incidents of physical violence towards the children?; How much time do each of the parents spend with the children on an average day?; What sorts of activities does the family do together? By piecing together a picture of how the family operates we are better able to determine whether it will be traumatic for the child to go for, say a month, without seeing the other parent or whether that particular child could benefit from a temporary break in contact. If the child has adequate verbal skills and can be made to feel comfortable enough, it would be very beneficial for workers to speak directly to children about whether they wish to see the other parent or not.

The situation can be pulling a child in two ways:

a) The mother doesn't want the child to see the father and the child is too torn with feelings of loyalty to speak up.

b) The child may want to not see the father for a while and the mother is insisting that they visit to rid her of some of her guilt about taking the children away.

Being consulted directly about this can greatly reduce the pressure that the child is under and will also alleviate some of the powerlessness they are experiencing.

It would be valuable for workers who are in contact with a father who is demanding visits with children, to try to assess his motives behind the demand for access. By gathering some information from the father about his day-to-day functioning with the children, workers will be better able to set up conditions for visits that will be comfortable and pleasurable. A couple of suggestions are outlining some ground rules with the father about what areas he can discuss with the children. This could tip him off to the fact that it is not the childrens' responsibility to relay messages between him and his wife, nor is it their duty to keep him informed of his wife's activities. Because some of these fathers are not in the habit of doing recreational kinds of things with their kids it would be helpful to discuss with them what they have planned for the visiting time - to offer suggestions as to places they could go with the children that they would enjoy. Even well-intentioned fathers who find themselves closeted away in some office for a visit with their children are somewhat at a loss to know what to do with the children when they see them, so they fall into talking about what is happening in the family and then the pressuring starts.

This is a very touchy area for me because I have seen the intensity of emotional stress it creates in children when they experience a visit that is not carefully planned. We have to keep in mind that children in this situation are in a state of emotional crisis and we must take utmost care in planning visits. While the family is at Transition House, one of the staff will usually keep a close eye on what is going on. But often when a woman moves to her new home, there has been an order for access with which she must comply, even though previous visits may have been very traumatic for the kids and her. I flash when I say this to a woman in Richmond with whom I had only phone contact. She was living in an apartment with her windows boarded up to prevent a very violent husband from breaking in. He had been terrorizing her and her two year old daughter by throwing bricks through their bedroom windows and gaining access to their suite by climbing over the balcony. She was caught in a difficult legal situation where four visits had been granted on an interim custody order and the final custody hearing was still a month away. She was bound by that order to give her child over to the father one afternoon a week, and she was terrified. Her worker and I both advised her to disappear but her lawyer had told her that that action might negatively affect her case for custody. So there they sat, immobilized with fear.

There must be a closer watch kept on these situations where children are being passed between mother and father during a period of family crisis. Where a woman has laid an assault charge against her husband, all the details of that assault have not come to light and the visits can put the woman and her children in a dangerous situation. Before orders of this type are made, workers must make it their responsibility to obtain all the details of why the charge has been laid. There should be an assessment done after the initial few visits to give the children an opportunity to discuss how they are finding the visits and any areas of concern they may have. So far as I know, this is not common practice and there is considerable buck-passing between agencies when it comes to following up on these families.

As the lone child care worker at Transition House I can be effective in providing the children with a positive few weeks - but it feels very superficial. It's easy to cheer up and distract young toddlers, babies and most preschoolers, but when I'm faced with kids who are ten and up who have been living in a violent environment since birth, I find that the trust level is so slight and fragile that I can't make even a dent. The frustration lies in seeing these kids return to an unchanged home situation and knowing that until they take their aggression to the streets or start making those larger waves in the community, they will be continually exposed to this very damaging role modelling. The facilities to deal with these children are almost non-existent. Any suggestions I have made would require additional time from all workers involved, time we all say we don't have. The children are in need of protection from following a pattern that may have existed in their family for decades. We need more Transition Houses and second stage facilities, mandatory community service hours and parent effectiveness training for fathers who abuse their wives and children. We must all demand increased monies from our government to plan and develop resources. This would at least indicate to us that they recognize family violence and its spinoffs, juvenile delinquency and child abuse, as a top priority.

APPENDIX VI

List of Services referred to in this report:

Powell Place	- An emergency shelter for women and children which is funded by the Ministry of Human Resources and run by St. James Social Service.
Owl House	- An emergency shelter with priority given to Native families. Owl House is funded by the Ministry of Human Resources and operated privately.
Munroe House	- Provides accommodation for second stage women leaving Transition House. Munroe House is funded by the Ministry of Human Resources and administered by the YWCA.
Red Door Rental Aid Society	- A housing registry with special attention to Ministry of Human Resources clients. It is funded by both the Ministry and the City of Vancouver.
Project Parent	- Project Parent is a resource for Ministry of Human Resources clients to assist them in developing parenting skills. It is both funded and operated by the Ministry.
YWCA Housing Registry	- Provides Vancouver-wide listings for housing with particular interest in assisting single parents. It is funded by the YWCA.

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